



## Tender Sensitivity of the Holy Spirit

### Pentecost Sunday

Ephesians 4:30

David Sunday

March 24, 2015

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Today I want us to focus laser-like on one verse of Scripture—Ephesians 4:30. This is from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus.

Let’s pray together before we read God’s Word.

Heavenly Father, we bow in Your presence, asking that as we open up the Word that Your Holy Spirit inspired, that Your Word would be our rule, Your Spirit our Teacher and Your greater glory our supreme concern. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let’s hear God’s Word. Verse 30 of Ephesians 4. *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* The NLT puts it like this: *“And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.”*

Those of you who know me well know that one of the things I hate most is disappointing people I love. Sometimes that can be a good quality, but sometimes that can be a snare called “the fear of man.” When I look into the eyes of someone I love and see pain or sorrow or tears, and I realize that I’m the reason for that pain, I hate it. I hate bringing grief to those I love.

It really is stunning to read in this Scripture that we can grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Grief here is a word that speaks of being hurt, feeling pain or distress. It is not saying “do not irritate or annoy the Holy Spirit” but rather, do not bring hurt. Do not bring pain. Do not bring distress to the Holy Spirit of God by your words, your actions, your unrepentant sin. We can cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit of God. This is a serious and significant reality. It has the potential to strengthen us in the pursuit of holiness, both personal holiness and corporate holiness as a body. This truth can actually comfort us when we realize what is actually being said here about our relationship to the Holy Spirit. So, on this Pentecost Sunday, I want to focus our attention on the tender sensitivity of the Holy Spirit. My aim is to exhort us as a people to be more earnest in our resolve not to grieve Him.

Our first point today is simply this: Let's be clear about Who the Holy Spirit is. **He is the Holy Spirit of God.** This is the only time in Paul's letters when he uses all of those words to name the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit of God." It's as if Paul wants to underscore for us the fact that the Holy Spirit is God. He is holy and He is God. He is a member of the Trinity. He is one of the blessed Three, equal with the Father and the Son. He is God, worthy of everlasting worship and praise. And as God, He is a Person. Not a fluid, not a force, not a power, not a mere energy or idea. He is a divine being with a personality. And sometimes we give away the fact that we don't really think of the Holy Spirit as a Person by the pronouns that we use to refer to Him. Sometimes we fall into referring to the Holy Spirit as "it" instead of "He." But whenever the Holy Spirit is spoken of in the Scriptures, we find personal pronouns. He is a divine being with a personality, and we are to relate to Him as God.

He is God Who was actively involved in the creation of the universe when the morning stars sang together, rejoicing in the creativity of their Maker. He is the One Who empowered the prophets to preach and Who inspired the writings of the sacred Scriptures. He is God Who anointed our Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity to preach the gospel and do signs and wonders, and then to go to the cross and to die there as an atonement for our sins. And He is God Who empowered Jesus to be raised from the dead. On the day of Pentecost, He, the Holy Spirit, came to make Himself known in a sense that He had not been known before. He came upon Christ's church and, with His coming, there came upon the disciples a remarkable resemblance to the living Lord Jesus Christ. They went forward into all the world, with power, transforming a weak-kneed group of disciples into men who turned the world upside down with the gospel. He is God. He is alive. And He is here with us today.

That brings us to the second truth about the Holy Spirit that underscores this passage: He is near. **He is near.** The Holy Spirit of God is personally present and sovereignly involved in every detail of the lives of believers. He is here. He is near in His church. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is not only with you, He is in you. Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, Whom you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*" This is astonishing! That the Ruler of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, the eternal, infinite God is not far removed from us. He does not reign in solitary isolation. He lives in us. He indwells His church. He makes His reign known by abiding within His people.

I read something A.W. Tozer wrote a number of years ago, and ever since I read this, these phrases have stuck in my mind. He says, "Just as our souls permeate our bodies and just as

the air fills all space around the earth, so the blessed Holy Spirit is here. He is nearer to us than our bodies or our breath.” Think about that. Remember that about the Holy Spirit: He is nearer to you than your body and your breath. He wants you to relate to Him personally. When you wake up in the morning, He wants you to gaze into the face of God and open your heart to Him—in the light of His presence—and to share your thoughts and your plans with Him. Ask Him to be your Teacher and Guide as you open up the Word, saying, “Take this living Word that You inspired and instruct me with it, Holy Spirit. Because without You, I am dead to this Word and I do not understand its power.” He wants us to interact with Him, to look to Him as the One Who illuminates the truth in our minds and Who shines the glory of Christ into our hearts. He wants us to look to Him as our Sanctifier Who enables us and empowers us to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to live in righteousness. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear in Romans 6-8 that we can only mortify the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit. And that means not just thinking of Him in some remote way, but looking to the Holy Spirit to enable us to resist temptation and say “no” to sin and walk in righteousness.

He wants us to look to Him as the One Who gives us assurance that we are indeed God’s children and Who cries out within us, “Abba, Father.” He wants us to look to Him as our Director and Leader in mission, Who sends us out to our neighbors and to the nations, to make known the glory of Christ and Who empowers our witness. You see, the Holy Spirit wants us to relate to Him in these things because all of the life, all of the joy, all of the power we need comes from Him.

The reality is, as J.D. Greer says it so well:

Many of us view the Holy Spirit kind of like we view our pituitary gland. We know it’s in there, somewhere. We know it’s necessary somehow for bodily growth and life, but we have no real interaction with our pituitary gland. We’ve never spoken to or heard from our pituitary gland. If you have, we have a counseling center available for you. Its work remains invisible and undetected even though you know it’s essential.

That’s the way we relate to the Holy Spirit—we remain distant. We don’t think about Him very much. We scratch our heads when Jesus says, “It’s to your advantage that I go away, or else the Comforter—the Helper—will not come to you.” The church right now is better off with the presence of the Holy Spirit than we would be if the Lord Jesus Christ were bodily among us right now (John 16:5-11). One of the reasons we’re better off is because Jesus is able to dwell in each one of us in every place. His gospel is able to go forth to the entire world because His gospel has come in His Spirit to all believers. This is the difference between faith and unbelief. Unbelief

says, “Yes, the Holy Spirit was there.” Unbelief does not say, “The Holy Spirit is here and with me.”

It’s like if you go to Gettysburg, you can say, “Yes, President Abraham Lincoln was here on a particular date in the 1860’s,” but you would not say, “President Lincoln is here now.”

The Holy Spirit is here today, in our life, in our church. He has authority over every aspect of our church. He has authority over every pastor and elder. He has authority over every plan that we make. He has authority over every family in our church. His Word has authority over every human voice. Nothing matters more than what He says to us in His Word. He has the right to teach us and command us and require of us all that He desires from us. He is Lord over our friendships and our habits, over our thoughts and our attitudes. He has the right to scrutinize and judge all that we say and do and believe. As God, He knows and sees everything that we do in our lives. We are never working alone, resting alone, playing alone, studying alone, partying alone, thinking alone, grieving alone. For the Spirit of the Lord is with us and in us. And that means we are never sinning alone, either. You never sin alone. He is nearer to you than your body and your breath.

How wonderful that One so infinitely high should stoop so low as to dwell in the lives of simple men and women in order to make us God’s holy temple. The Holy Spirit Who is God is near. And this, my friends, is the greatest motivation to personal holiness and corporate holiness. The Christian faith does not just give us an ethical system and say, “Here, go out and live like this.” No. It becomes very personal. Why do you pursue holiness? Why do you put off all these sinful ways that are surrounding verse 30 of Ephesians 4? It’s because the Spirit of the Living God dwells in you and you do not want to grieve Him. You want to bring Him glory with your life. You want to bring Him pleasure with your life. You do not want to wound and bring sorrow to the heart of the Holy Spirit. This is the chief motivation for the pursuit of holiness: that we would not bring grief but pleasure to the One Who has sealed us for the Day of Redemption. To Him be the glory.

Thirdly, this Holy Spirit Who is God and Who is near – He loves us. **The Holy Spirit loves you.** The fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved proves that He loves. Tozer had an illustration that I think was very moving:

Imagine that you are called by the police and they tell you, “A terrible crime has been committed. You need to come down to the police station to identify the criminals.” You walk into the police station. They bring you back to the room. There, sitting in that room, are two young men, one of whom is a good friend of your son’s. The other is your son. Over the friend, you may feel disappointment. You may feel anger. But over your son, you feel intense grief because you love him in a way that you could not love

just any other boy. You love this one whom you have accompanied since his birth and raised and cared for and pleaded for before God. You love him, and the greater the love the greater the grief when that love is spurned and sinned against.

We all know what it's like to have someone angry with us. If you've never had anyone angry with you, you're in denial. We all know what it's like. And anger doesn't draw us to a person. Anger usually repels us. When someone's red in the face and angry, you want to get away from them. You don't want to draw near. But grief is a different kind of anger. Spurgeon said, "Grief is a sweet combination of anger and love. It is anger with all the bitterness removed. Anger wishes ill upon a person as a punishment for his sins. Grief mourns over the ill of sin itself."

Parents, our kids know what it's like to make us angry. Do they know what it's like to see their parents grieved over their sin? There is a difference. Grief is anger with the bitterness removed. It's sorrow over what the sin is doing to the sinner and not just fury at the sin itself.

The Holy Spirit is grieved because He loves us. He gave us birth when we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-10). He convicted us. He gave sight to our blind eyes. He protects us from all kinds of evil. He reads with us the Word of God and teaches us what it means. He is powerfully present and sovereignly involved in our lives. He loves us. He is near to us. The same love that moved the Father to send the Son to the cross to die for our sins, and that moved the Son to go there is the same love that moves the Spirit to come and live in sinners like us and bear with us and to never leave us. So, when we sin, we're not simply offending God's law, we're offending God's love which is even worse.

That brings us to two questions for application.

Number one: What are the consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit? Look at verse 30 again. "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" Paul does not motivate with a threat here; he motivates with security. He does not say, "Do not grieve Him or He will abandon you." Or, "He will give up on you. Do not grieve Him or you will lose your salvation." No. He says, "The Holy Spirit has marked you out as God's own. He has authenticated you as a child of God. He has sealed you. He has guaranteed that He will complete the work God began in you. You are secure in His love. Therefore, do not grieve Him."

Now, if the thought of your security in Christ causes you to flippantly say, "Oh well, as long as I can't lose my salvation, then I'm not going to worry about sinning," then I tell you that the reality of your salvation is in question. Because the way it works for a child of God is that we look at how much God loves us and how much Jesus has done to save us and the fact that the

Spirit dwells in us and promises that He won't leave us. We see that kind of love and we say, "Oh, now I would hate to bring sorrow to a God Who loves me so." And this truth of our security in Christ actually causes us to want to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who is at work within us, both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12). So the consequence of grieving the Spirit is not that He will leave us. No. He says, "I will stay."

It's like the testimony I heard this week of a woman who married a man. She loved him and early on in the marriage she discovered that he was involved in multiple infidelities which kept going on. There would be occasional repentance but finally, one day she found his truck parked outside the apartment of another woman. And when he came home, his heart so hardened by sin, he just wanted his wife to say, "I'm divorcing you." Instead, she said to him, "I will not give you a divorce. I'm not going to make it that easy." That tenacity of devotion and love had the effect over time of melting and bringing true repentance to her husband's heart.

The Spirit says, "I will not divorce the children of God. I'm in it until the Day of Redemption. I'm not giving up." That has the effect of making us not want to grieve Him.

I do believe that when we grieve the Holy Spirit it can be like when you grieve a dear friend and you're insensitive to the fact that you're grieving him or her. They love you too much to stop being your friend, but a chill comes over the relationship. You can't really be comfortable in each other's presence until that offense is dealt with. You can't move comfortably with each other. When we grieve the Holy Spirit, a chill can come over our relationship where He's no longer moving freely among us and you can almost feel that chill settle in, even corporately over a body. When we lose that joy that is supposed to be the mark of the Kingdom, when we lose that peace, hope, warmth, vitality and sense that the Spirit is moving freely among us, it could be time for us to get down on our knees and say, "Holy Spirit, how have we been grieving You? How do we need to repent?" More than anything, we want the warmth and the free movement of His presence in our lives. We want Him to be at home in our midst. We want our hearts to be a holy habitation for the Spirit of the living God, not a filthy hovel of all kinds of sin.

So the consequences are not that He will leave us. He promises we are sealed. But there can come a chill in the relationship; there can come a loss of joy. There can come occasions when the Spirit says, "If you keep grieving Me, I'm going to hand you over to the spirit of temptation. You're going to see how wicked your heart is. You are going to tremble at how far you can run from God." But He won't let you go altogether. All this is to lead us to repentance.

Second question: What causes the Holy Spirit to be grieved? I suppose we could spend weeks on this subject and it would probably be pretty depressing. But what I want to do is just look at the context here and notice what Paul highlights. A lot of these are sins that we commit

against each other within the body. The Holy Spirit Who is near to you is also near to your brother and sister in Christ. The Holy Spirit Who loves you also loves your brother and sister in Christ. He dwells in our midst.

Look at verse 25, *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”* Deceit. Lying. Shadiness in our dealings grieves the Holy Spirit.

Verse 26: *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”* Unrestrained anger brings grief to the Spirit.

Verse 28: *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”* Not being content with what you have, holding back what belongs to others, not giving faithfully to the work of the Lord and thereby expressing that you understand that all you have comes from Him but instead using all that you have on yourself, this grieves the Spirit. It’s thievery.

Verse 29: *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”* Corrupting speech grieves the Spirit of God.

Verses 31-32: *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

You see, friends, no one knows how kind God has been to you like the Holy Spirit does. No one understands how patient, how forgiving, how merciful He’s been like the Holy Spirit. He’s been with you at every point along the way. He sees how much you have needed God’s mercy. When He finds within us attitudes and actions that show that we don’t appreciate the mercy that we have been shown, or when we are unwilling to show that same mercy and grace and kindness to our brothers and sisters in Christ, the Spirit is grieved at how insensitive we have become to the mercy of God in our lives.

He won’t abandon us. He loves us. He’s ready to restore us, revive us and bring us to repentance. He will continue God’s work of sanctification in us until we are saved to sin no more. So lift up your heads, friends, and rejoice in the tender sensitivity of the Spirit of God in your life. Don’t ever say, “I’m just a sinner saved by grace,” and use that as an excuse to go on sinning. Instead, realize that you’re not just a sinner anymore. You are a saint indwelt by the Spirit of holiness. He is in you and He is committed to finishing the good work He’s begun in you (Philippians 1:6). Let this move you to groan over the ways in which you grieve Him and to be glad that He loves you enough to be grieved over your sin.

A few years ago, John Piper wrote a little poem titled “Doubly Relieved” as he reflected on ways he believed he had grieved the Holy Spirit. Listen to what he wrote:

My patient Comforter, my God,  
My Life, my Breath, my holy Zeal,  
My soul is doubly sorrowful:  
That I still sin against your Seal,

And sinning cause my Sovereign grief.  
I know it is your holy way  
To make your grief serve perfect joy,  
But I still pray, O bring the day

When, in the twinkling of an eye,  
My soul will doubly be relieved:  
I will not ever sin again,  
And you will nevermore be grieved.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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