Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

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[0:00] Let's turn back then to Ephesians chapter 4, and we're going to look at verse 30 there, where Paul says, And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption, particularly the opening words, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Obviously, the subject is before us, grieve not the Holy Spirit. And what I want to do with this, to begin with, is simply to remind you that Jesus, the Divine Redeemer, had a great deal to say about the person, and indeed the personality too, and the work of the Holy Spirit.
He taught quite a lot, we have it recorded in a few chapters there, in John's Gospel, chapters 14, 15, and 16, are key areas of teaching there that Jesus gave us.
And what we find is that he taught, for example, that the Spirit is fully divine, equal in power and glory with both the Father and the Son.
And, again, you can see much of that in these chapters I've referred to. But, to me, one of the most compelling references that Jesus gives us about the full Godhood of the person, of the Holy Spirit, is in what we call the baptismal formula there, in Matthew 28, 20, where he says that he tells his disciples, when they go out into all the world, to all the nations, and make disciples, teaching them, instructing them on the things that he has taught, and then he says baptizing them in the name.
[2:16] Not in the names of, but in the name of God, of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

And that, to me, is the most compelling and succinct reference Jesus gives us, that he sees the Holy Spirit both as person and as equal in power and glory to both the Father and the Son.
And it's important to think about it this way, because we'll be coming to a few thoughts on what some very able people have tried to say about this text, and what it refers to when you were told not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
And it's important for us to know what the Bible does say, and what the Savior himself made very clear. Both the Savior and the Apostles, I suggest, make it very clear to us that the Spirit is not only fully divine, equal in power and glory to Father and Son, but that he performed actions and he experienced things that are consistent with personality.
That remind us that he is a person in his own right. We say person with inverted commas, because I'm looking at you as persons.
[3:47] And we can't think about God's Trinity, the tripersonalness of God, in terms of three individuals. Or we'll get it wrong.

It's not that simple. That's a crass way of understanding. The man who first used the word persons with reference to the Father, Son and Spirit said, we say this in order not to be silent.
In other words, he couldn't find a word. You could say personal subsistences, but I don't think anybody would want to be thinking like that, articulating like that.
Although that is much more helpful from a theological point of view. So we say persons with inverted commas, and we say that the Spirit performs actions, and he has experiences that are consistent with having personality.
And here in Ephesians 4.30, it is the feelings of a person that are focused on. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.
[5:09] And it follows from that, quite obviously, we can grieve the Holy Spirit of God. If the people to whom Paul addressed the word, and countless generations since, because it is the living word of the living God, if he says do not grieve, it means we can grieve him, and we must know what it is to grieve him, and we must know how to avoid grieving him, if we're to benefit from his ministry.

And in the context, it is clear that the result of grieving the Holy Spirit was that they paid the price.

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They experienced God's displeasure in their lives, what we call chastisement, discipline, correction. And so this is a serious business, and we should, as we intend to do, consider it.
The first thing I want us to look at is to consider what is meant, what is meant by grieving the Holy Spirit. Now, it's actually surprising that some very capable commentators on the Bible have understood this simply as grieving the human spirit that God has worked on and has renewed. Therefore, it's a Holy Spirit with small letters. And that is an opinion that has been held by not a view of the Bible interpreters.
[6:49] Some excellent Greek scholars, they were rationalists in their thinking, but it has to be said they were excellent Greek scholars, just the same.

But they were very much of a rationalistic school. And they say that this has to do with, don't grieve the moral sentiment, if you like, and then in brackets, the Holy Spirit of a person, of a Christian, by what you say or do.
There's not much between these two, but I mention them simply to show that that's what a body of opinion has suggested. One of the notable schoolmen, you wouldn't call him a schoolman necessarily, but that's what he's called in theology, Thomas Aquinas, says something not much different.
Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of others, again it's small letters Holy Spirit, of others, by your actions. Now, as I said, there's not much difference in these views.
But they're all, on the basis of Paul's teaching and the Saviour's own teaching, simply wrong. They're not consistent with the truth of the Scriptures.
[8:13] The reference is clearly to the Holy Spirit of God. In fact, this designation, the Holy Spirit of God, is one of the fullest. It's one of the most comprehensive expressions, with reference to the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit of God.

Sometimes, Paul will say, quench not the Spirit. Or he uses the word Spirit, pneuma, in the original, without the definite article, the Spirit.
And it's clear, nonetheless, he's referring to the Holy Spirit. But this reference, you don't need the Greek for it either. It's clear, he says, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
And in ever so many places in Scripture, this is the full designation of the third person. He is referred to as the infinite personal Spirit, who is himself God, of very God, and yet a distinct person within the tri-personal being of God, as we say, the Trinity.
And therefore it follows that he can be grieved. He is a person, I say, with feelings.
[9:42] Now, we're on difficult ground here, I know. That we can't draw together human feelings and the feelings of God.

You can't bring them together and say they're the same. But we can't say that our feelings are in a way like his, in terms of what you would call holy natural feelings.
Of elation, of joy, of praise, of thanksgiving. Jesus himself said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, and so on.
Of sadness, of grief, of sorrow, of anger. There are lines drawn.
There's a likeness of our feelings, of the better feelings, to God's. But there is a great gulf between them.
[10:44] We have to understand that. But that's not the same as saying God doesn't feel. It's not the same as saying God doesn't have joy and gladness, you see.

Some people would say God has no feelings. And what we're saying here is clearly, Paul is saying, the spirit can be grieved.
The word grieved is to cause sorrow to. And he's saying here, this is the very thing we're to realize and to be aware of.
John Eadie, a commentator in Scotland in the late 19th century, says, The Holy Spirit represents himself as susceptible of affront and sorrow.
He can be grieved. He is susceptible of affront and of sorrow. And if you wondered at all, I hope you did, why we read in Isaiah 63 from 7 to 14, it was precisely because there you see in the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit was among the professing people of God of Israel of old.
[12:05] And there, the people grieved the Holy Spirit. You're giving me a nod. Good. They rebelled against him, and it grieved him.

And he became their enemy and fought against them. And we have in those few words in chapter 10 that the rebelliousness of Israel caused the Spirit of God grief, and he became their enemy.

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He was displeased, but he was moved in his heart as it were. And he became their enemy and fought against them. Their conduct hurt him and hurt him sorely.
It displeased him. And we can't and mustn't reduce this to merely figurative language that means very little, as some have tried to do.
We've got to take this seriously. There are feelings, to quote E.D. again in his excellent work on this, there are feelings analogous to those excited in man.
[13:18] In other words, there's a similarity there. Of course, that is in all its perfection in God. But there are feelings, he says, analogous to those excited in man that are named after such human emotions as grief and sorrow.

And of course, many another thing too. And therefore, we're to take this to heart. We're to take it seriously. We're not to minimize it so far that it disappears and it's irrelevant.
Good, you're nodding. That's why we take it seriously. I'm not pretending, don't get me wrong, I'm not pretending we can comprehend the feelings of the Lord.
We simply, we get the picture in the language that's used. But for sure, to digress for a moment, you get the picture of the feelings of the Father when it is said, He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.
There's feelings there. The heart of God goes out to man in his sin and rebellion. And He sent His Son in love to save that world.
[14:50] To all who would receive the Son of Islam. So, to go back. When it is said, Grieve not the Holy Spirit.

Let's be clear that what is meant here is something serious. We can, by our folly and sin and rebellion, even as Christians, grieve the Spirit of God.
Second, what causes the Spirit grief? What causes the Spirit grief? Well, I know.
And if you're listening, you know it too. I've anticipated this a little. But, the context of Ephesians 4 leaves us in no doubt about the subject.
When professing Christians actually behave as if they never knew the work of the Spirit in them.
[15:51] As if they never knew the reality of of being sanctified, of being set apart to God. When they behave as if they never knew His holy work in them.

Then they grieve Him. When they behave as unbelievers. That grieves the Spirit of God.
You see, go back to verse 17. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles in the futility of their minds.
And then he describes how they are. In other words, you're not to go back. You're not to go back to the way you used to be or the way the world is.
No, verse 20, you have not so learned Christ. And if Christians, and sadly they do, behave as if they'd never known the work of the Spirit in them, they rebel.
[17:00] They grieve the Spirit of God. You see, back in Ephesians 2, verse 8, we're told, By grace you are saved through faith.

And that not of yourselves, it's a gift of God. Do you know the verse? It's a wonderful verse. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. And then he says this, For you are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, and to good works, which God ordained that you should walk in.
And when Christians don't walk in, and sadly sometimes they don't, they are not only in trouble, they not only have a bad witness, but they grieve the Spirit of God, and he will correct them.
When they bring their standards down, from what God appoints, to the world's standards, they're in trouble. That's why he says, for example, in verse 25, Therefore putting away lying.
Let each one of you speak truth to his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Lies seem to people to be a convenient way to avoid facing what they've done.
[18:31] But for the Lord's people, they should have no place in their thinking at all. Therefore put away lying. We were taught as children that one of the seven things the Lord hates is a lying tongue.

And therefore, you see, a Christian is to have no track with a lie. And sometimes, even when it hurts us to tell the truth, we're to tell it.
We're to speak the truth. And he says, he says, be angry and do not sin. Don't have this unrighteous fury.

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It has no place in you. Don't steal. I was thinking, when I was reading this, I once heard a professor from Northern Ireland give a lecture on the year of grace in Northern Ireland.
That was 1859, I think it was. And he was talking about the impact the revival had. And yes, they had shipyards in those days too, over there.
[19:50] And they had to, when men who were shipyard workers came into the power of the Spirit of God and the message of Jesus and they were transformed, they brought back huge heaps of pilfer that they'd stolen from the engineering works and the shipyards.

They had to open, they had to open departments to deal with it all coming back. So, stealing has no place in the life of the Lord's people.
And you see, see what I'm saying here. Paul is addressing real situations. These things were happening among the Ephesians and they were grieving the Holy Spirit.
And he was saying, cut it out. Stop. Filthy language. We're, we're, we're surrounded in it. You can hardly watch the television and it's in your ear.
You can hardly read a magazine or a newspaper it's there. The radio, the same. We're surrounded with it. I was listening to something on Saturday just travelling and it was, it was on for a wee while those who are fruitful devotees will sometimes see a Tom Cowan and a few of them off the ball and then you're laughing.
[21:24] And, he was trying to argue for the right to have swearing in, in, in these tweets on the internet. Those who don't know tweets don't worry about it.

But, but, he was arguing that 12 year old children shouldn't dictate what adults do. And, the point I'm making is, filthy language is now becoming common.
People are now justifying that it's okay. And, he goes on and he says, no bitterness either. Don't be in a perpetual state of animosity.
don't use words that are really your pent-up fury unleashed at others.
Be different. Don't have ill will. He has a whole list of them there. I'm just summarizing them. These things grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
[22:28] The attitude of heart and the words that are spoken grieve the Spirit. And, Christians can be guilty of one or all.

And, he says, don't because it grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Don't do these things. See that your behavior matters.
Your conduct is important. Conduct yourselves here as those who have been renewed in the spirit of their minds by the work of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God.
Jesus taught in the parable, time is gone, so we must move on, but Jesus taught in the parable that there were people who professed them, but they let the world affect them.
and they went off on tangents. And, to all appearances, the story is they never really had the truth in them at all.
[23:38] They never loved the gospel. But, Paul is addressing people here who are still professing the gospel, and they're grieving the Spirit.

And, we must recognize the things that do grieve, and take seriously turning from them. And, that's the last thing I want to think about.
How do we avoid grieving the Spirit? Well, we've really looked at some of the negatives there. Don't do the things that we've referred to above, and we can leave that. But, we're looking now, finally, at the positive side of it. go back to basics.
There's a place for going back to basics, for just going back and looking at what it is to become a Christian. How we came as believers to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[24:43] And, the moment you start to think about that, you're into the work of the Spirit. of God.

I'm sure I told this one before, within six and a half years, but I remember the Reverend John McSween. I didn't know him really, except that he had ministered in Scara in the north of Scotland, in my home county, Sutherland.
But, he came once when I was in college to give a lecture at our theological society. And, of course, those who know anything of John McSween will remember he was an eminent theologian.
And, he was talking about actually the sanctifying work, the progressive work of the Spirit in the believer, making them more and more like Christ. And, he was talking about a young lass from the faith mission who asked if he was a born-again Christian.

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And, his quick reply was, I didn't know there was any other kind of Christian. I thought I was most astute. Strictly speaking, there isn't.
[26:03] We talk about nominal Christians who are in-name Christians. They're not Buddhists or Muslims or Sikhs or whatever. it. But, John should have a point, you see, that, strictly speaking, there isn't a true Christian who's not born again.

If he's born again, he is a Christian in truth. If he's not born again, he's not a true Christian. So, what am I saying? We're back to the basics.
The basics of the work of the Spirit of God in a believer in Jesus. In fact, in Galatians, Paul addresses the Galatians in that very way.
Remember, there was a crowd come in from Jerusalem who were trying to, they were Judaizers, they were trying to get Jews who had believed back into the fold or at least in a halfway house. Paul says to the most foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you before whom Christ was portrayed crucified, I would ask you this, how did you receive the Holy Spirit?
[27:21] Was it by works or by faith? And he goes on to say, wasn't it by the believing hearing of the message?

God, and of course it was. The Spirit came upon them in power, they believed the report in truth about Jesus because the Spirit worked in them.
It wasn't that they worked for salvation, it was that the Spirit came upon them and they believed the word. That's how we became followers of Jesus, if we're that today.
we learned the truth in Jesus through the ministry of the Spirit. You see it in verse 20. And that is the very opposite of the world.
If indeed you have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, it's the Lord, the Spirit, who teaches us the truth in Jesus.
[28:29] It's the Lord, the Spirit, who works in us to renew our minds in the things of the Lord and to relate all the subjects under the Son to that same Lord.

He is Lord of all. And we are encouraged therefore to see what we have to put off and to see what we have to put on in moral things.
So that our thinking is affected Godward. And our lives in this world are affected by the things of God.
Don't be content with the minimum is what he said. Don't be content with the minimum progress in Christian life. But go on, be transformed.
joy. And that way, you'll be a delight to the Spirit of God and not a grief to him. Enjoy the things of God.
[29:37] I'm sure somebody else said this, but I can't remember. enjoy the things of God and you will grow and not grieve the Spirit of the Lord.

Because you see, the things of God are the things the Spirit of God teaches us. What did Jesus say? He shall teach you all things concerning me.
And it is that same Spirit who seals us for the day of redemption.
That is to say, when the world and time as we know shall be no more and will be home and dry in the body with the Lord. But that's a subject we're going to look at later on today.
Enough to say, let's be clear on what it is to grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, to recommit ourselves, rededicate ourselves to taking seriously this teaching that we can grieve him, that it's harmful to us to grieve him, and come humbly and return and confess that we need not only forgiveness but renewal, that we may be sensitive to the teaching and the prompting of the Spirit of God in the way of truth.
[31:20] That's what keeps us going on. That's what enables us to distinguish between what is compromising to the world and its standards and going robustly in God's way.

Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God by whom you are sealed for the day of redemption. Amen.
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