

## GRIEVING THE SPIRIT

Text: Ephesians 4:30

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Reading the daily paper is not always a pleasant experience. I mean you read of another murder or drunken violence, car accident or earth quake, domestic violence and so it goes on. What is striking is that we can read all that stuff and not get emotional. Why? Because we are distant from it. We don't know the people. We feel sorry that these things occur. But it doesn't affect us personally. However what if we hear that someone we love has died? Then our grief is palpable. Why the difference? We were close to that person. We loved that person. The level of grief we experience depends on the relationship. The closer we are the deeper the grief. If someone I don't know steals my wallet I will be angry. If one of my own children steals from me I'll be not just angry. I'll be deeply grieved, let down by someone I love and trust.

In our text (Ephesians 4:30) the Apostle Paul writes "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" Notice that: do not 'grieve' the Spirit. It is striking that Paul does not say 'Do not make the Spirit angry'. He uses a more delicate and tender word. If another person is angry with us we tend to get defensive and respond with anger. But if we grieve someone it touches our heart and we feel bad. I think that's Paul's intent. The word 'grieve' comes from the Greek word 'lupete'. That word comes from the Greek 'lupe' which refers to the pain or grief that is experienced between two people who deeply love each other. It was used to picture a husband or wife who discovered their spouse had been unfaithful. As a result of the unfaithfulness the betrayed spouse is devastated and deeply wounded. So think about that. The word Paul uses implies the Holy Spirit is in a love relationship similar to but much greater than the love between husband and wife.

We said last week the Holy Spirit is not just a power in us. He is a person, with his own character and personality. He is the artist who puts on the 'finishing touches' to the Father's creative work and to Jesus' saving work. He has a servant nature, always wanting to make Jesus known in our lives. This person, the Spirit who lives in us, loves us. We can think of God the Father loving us: '*God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son*'. We know Jesus deeply loves us. He gave his life for us on the cross. Do we also recognise the Spirit deeply loves us? You know, or perhaps can remember, how it is when we are 'in love'. We think about that person all the time. We dream about them. We want to be with them. The Holy Spirit longs for us. He wants to be close to us. He wants to do wonderful things in our lives. Things like revealing Jesus and helping us to become more like him. It was the Spirit, perhaps already when we were children, who gently brought the message and joy of Jesus into our hearts. It was the Spirit who stirred our conscience in our youth when we had a time of going off the rails. It was the Spirit who softened our stubborn wills to repent and accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. It is the Spirit who now whispers in our hearts and reassures us that we are God's children. The Spirit's love, like the Father's love, is very deep and never ending. It is pure. He knows and wants what is best for us. Grasp the significance of this: in you as a Christian is God the Spirit who loves you immensely. He is someone who wants to work in us to bring out all the joy and hope and promises that are in Christ. But like any person who loves another, there is the risk of being hurt if the other person fails you. Because the Spirit is in a deeply loving relationship with us we can cause him to grieve; at times very deeply.

Now that should make us think again about how we live. Think of the difference between being caught by the police and facing the disappointment of your mother. I have heard of young men saying to police 'does my mother need to know?' Facing a stern policeman is easier than facing the broken heart of a mother. Sin is not just breaking some rules set by some judgmental God. It is not just about being defensive with someone we have made angry. It's about betraying the one who loves us with a depth we will never fully grasp. If we see someone who loves us deeply is upset, grieved by our actions, we feel really bad and want to make it right. That is how we need to understand the affect of sin. We 'grieve the Spirit' when we go against what God has said in his Word. Note how Paul describes the Spirit as "*the Holy Spirit*". He is

holy. He is good and righteous just like God the Father. When we sin we not only go against God's laws. We are taking the Spirit, in us, with us. We take him into that sinful situation. Doing that is a total betrayal of who the Spirit is. He is God. He is good. He is holy. Sinning is tearing into his very character. Because he loves us so deeply it hurts him badly. He is not just angry at our wrong. He is grieved by your betrayal. We can understand then the Spirit's grief if we have neglected prayer. The Spirit sees you active with hours of being on the computer and watching TV but have no time for prayer. If we forget to read our Bibles it hurts the Spirit because he inspired the Word to be written as God's speaking to us. You might remember we have said that our devotional time is key to our 'passionate spirituality'. If we neglect our time with God our passion drops significantly. That is the affect on us if the Spirit is constantly grieved. He bears with us. But as he is grieved again and again and again he withdraws. His light, his joy, his comfort for us are gone. He is not heard because we have refused to listen to his Word and promptings. When we sense a distance in our relationship with God we need to ask if we are engaged in some persistent sin that we refuse to deal with and won't listen to the Spirit. He may withdraw for a time so we realise we have grieved him and we need to deal with it.

To understand why the Spirit is so grieved we have to think again of his work. His task is to take people who are spiritually dead in sin, people who are blind to the grace of God, people who are the enemies of God and turn them into the children of God. The Spirit does that by bringing us to believe in Jesus. He opens us to accept that Jesus gave himself as a complete sacrifice to pay the price for sin. He stirs us to see Jesus' death and resurrection as an action that brings the amazing grace of God into our lives. But that's not the end of his work. Once a person is converted there's a lot of 'house cleaning' that needs to be done. Attitudes need to change. Sinful habits need to be broken. Each time we decide to go against what God wants, when we sin, we go right against the very work and character of the Spirit. We go right against the enormous cost to Jesus on the cross. We go right against the 'finishing touches' the Spirit wants to bring into our lives.

Now, the grieving of the Spirit is not just what we do individually. It also about us communally, together as a church. What Paul says in our text is directed to the body as

a whole. The word 'you' in our text is in the plural in the Greek. As they say in the American south 'Y'all quit grieving the Spirit, with whom y'all were sealed for the day of redemption'. The Spirit brings about 'unity' as Paul writes about at the start of chapter 4 (verse 3,4) "*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit... There is one body and one Spirit.*" In the immediate context of our text, (verse 29-31) we see Paul saying "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander along with every form of malice.*" You see all these things are what breaks up unity. They break apart what we are together in Christ. When that occurs, the Spirit who loves Jesus, who wants to glorify Jesus, who loves us dearly and wants to bring us together in the one body of Christ, is in deep pain. When there is conflict in the church his grief is unbearable. We grieve the Spirit if we have a consumer attitude towards the church: 'What can I get out of church?' Jesus did not die to make you a sanctified consumer. You are here to be part of one body to serve with others who make disciples and bring hope to the community.

The fact the Spirit is so hurt is a sign of how much he cares. Where we don't have a relationship with a person, we don't really care that much what happens to them. We can just walk away. And with that we see something else amazing in this text. Note the second half: "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" In Paul's day every one had their own seal. It was usually a ring or a stamp that was worn around the neck. It was your sign of guarantee. You didn't just sign your name because that could be forged. You authenticated your document by pressing your seal into the wax and making a permanent mark that could not be erased. That 'seal' also implied possession. A tradesman marks his tools so they aren't stolen. Those tools are his. God put his seal on us when he gave us his Holy Spirit. When you first heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit took up residence in your life. His presence in your heart is God's seal. God is saying 'This is my child'. Paul writes in Romans 8:16 "*...the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*". In Ephesians 1:13,14 he writes "*...having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession...*" So the Spirit is himself our guarantee that we will indeed be part of the

glorious kingdom of God. As the 'seal' he gives a clear message to the devil who would love to claim you as his own. The seal says 'That one belongs to me. Don't you dare meddle with someone who carries my seal'. And that seal also carries with it the commitment on the part of the Holy Spirit. On the last day, when Jesus comes as judge of all the world, how can he miss his own seal? How can he miss that we have been bought with the blood of Jesus, sealed with the Spirit. So, no matter how much we 'grieve the Spirit', he will never leave us. He can't, he won't. He is God's gift to us. He is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

Now if that is the case we need to do some serious thinking about our relationship with him. The Spirit is not going to walk away when the pain gets too much to protect his feelings and attacks on his holy character. He may go quiet when we keep on deliberately sinning. We won't feel the joy and life and spontaneity he brings in our lives. But he won't leave us. That shows you the depth of his love. He knows our every thought, our every word, our every action, stuff no one else will ever know. He knows the deep dark recesses of our hearts. He sees the sin, the dirt, the failure. He knows it all, not just the good face we put on for others. And still the Spirit loves us. Still he stays with us. He will always be there till the end, guaranteeing our hope in Christ. Even when he is so badly grieved for so long. That is love for you. There we see the depth of God's grace.

Of course, once we see again how loved we are, we need to ask how can we live so that we don't grieve the Spirit? Every morning remind yourself who it is that lives in you and live accordingly. Live in his presence. I remember a discussion with the CEO of an old folks' home some years ago. He was concerned about the drop in moral standards in society. Then he said 'It doesn't help much now that you ministers don't wear a clerical collar any more. You ministers should go back to doing that.' His reason was people act differently when a minister is around. Rough swearing blokes, used to go meek when they saw a priest in his clerical garb: 'Sorry rev, didn't realise you were there.' They change their behaviour with a minister present. That's how we should live. We should recognise wherever we are, whatever we are doing, whatever we are watching, whatever we are thinking about, God is there all knowing. Remember I said that the word 'grieve' Paul uses here was the word used when a spouse has been

unfaithful. But think of this; if the one who had been unfaithful had always had their spouse with them, would they have had the opportunity to be unfaithful? No. This is what Paul is getting us to see. There are things we would not be doing if we recognise the Spirit is always with us. So talk to him every day to remind yourself he is there with you, in you, loving you. Listen to him, through his Word and as he prompts you, as he reminds you deep inside you are God's child. If you realise the Spirit is present, and you remember how awfully grieved and hurt he is by our sin, then you will look at your life very differently.

### **Questions for reflection.**

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? What does the concept imply about the relationship the Spirit has with us?
- In what areas of your life are you most likely to grieve the Spirit? Now that you realise (again) how you hurt the Spirit how will that affect what you do?
- How can you increase your awareness of the presence of the Spirit? What will you do?