

## No Middle Ground

*Ephesians 4:30-31*

**W**e're either pleasing God, or grieving Him. There is no middle ground.

On our tour through Ephesians 4, we've explored such things as gossip, telling falsehood, unresolved anger, stealing, and unwholesome talk. We've seen that those things are inconsistent with the life that Christ has given us. At the same time, we learned that the life Christ has given us is a transforming power that comes in and changes us from the inside out. Instead of falsehood, we now tell the truth. Instead of unresolved anger, there is love. Instead of taking, there is sharing with others who are in need. Instead of trash talking, there is speech that is edifying and useful for building others up.

But then we come to a very interesting verse, one that sticks out from the rest of them. It's verse thirty: *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."* What does that mean, to "grieve" the Holy Spirit of God? How can we know if we are doing that, and how can we avoid it?

Let's pause for a few minutes and think about that word "grieve." The meaning of grieving is something you and I also know within ourselves: emotional pain, distress, anguish, sorrow, or heartbreak. Every one of us has known grief. We know what it is, how it feels, and the damage it can do to us. Each one of us has tasted grief in one form or another, and we know how bitter it is. Some have experienced grief in devastating ways, while others of us have gone through only brief periods of grief and hurt. The conduct of a rebellious, wayward child can also cause much grief in a parent. Proverbs 17:25 bears this out -- *"A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him."*

When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, then reported to their father that he had been killed by a wild animal, he was inconsolable. Genesis 31 describes his grief: *"Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.' So his father wept for him."* Jacob experienced such intense grief over the apparent loss of his son Joseph that he simply could not be consoled by anyone. How much more grief would he have felt had he known what his other sons had really done to Joseph, and how they had lied to their father?

Allow the story of Joseph and his father Jacob's grief to help you to understand the grief that we can cause the Holy Spirit of God when we sin. What distresses or breaks the heart of God? The human race had not been long on the earth until we were causing Him great pain. Start with Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden. Continue with Cain brutally killing his brother

Abel. By the time we get to chapter 6, we find these heartrending words: “*The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain*” (Genesis 6:5-6).

You see, our wickedness and rebellion cause grief and heartache for God’s Holy Spirit. It’s been going on for a long, long time. The original language in Ephesians 4:30 literally reads, “Stop grieving the Spirit, the Holy One of God.” Once again, Paul tells us to stop doing something we are currently engaged in. “The things you’ve been doing have been grieving the Holy Spirit of God—stop it!” But there is a beautiful truth implied in this harsh command. The very fact that God’s Holy Spirit could be grieved at all tells us that He loves us and has a vested interest in us and our well-being. God loves us enough that He can be grieved when we disobey Him in any way. Only a person who loves can be grieved. Here is a very good example of that:

Valerie Bertinelli once starred on the television program *One Day at a Time*. She was married for several years to rock star Eddie Van Halen. She wrote a book a few years ago entitled *Losing It: And Gaining My Life Back One Pound at a Time*. She was talking about her weight loss through the Jenny Craig program, but she opened up about a lot more than that. She went all over the place talking about the book, being interviewed in newspapers and television shows. In her book she told about cocaine use and her failed marriage, but also about the affair she had with Steven Spielberg, while she was still married to Van Halen. Now, when I heard a snippet of one of her interviews, I was saddened, of course, that those things should have happened at all. But the sadness I felt was nothing compared to what I would feel had **I** been married to her when she was doing those things.

Do you see the difference? As one human being feeling compassion for another, I am sorry she’s done those things. But I have no relationship with Valerie Bertinelli, no vested interest—and I do not grieve the experiences of her life in the same way. The fact that the things I have done have grieved the Holy Spirit—have broken His heart, as one paraphrase of the Scriptures puts it—tells me that He loves me in an intimate, caring, close, personal, cherished way. The Holy Spirit is grieved, saddened and anguished whenever we commit sin because of His great love for us—the same love that sent Jesus to the Cross to die for our sins. He has a definite vested interest in us and in the level of holiness in our lives: *God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son*. What a price to have paid for our sin, when we are all too satisfied to continue doing the same old things that sent Christ to the cross in the first place!

Oh, that we would be broken by our sin! As I was writing this sermon, each letter I typed on the keyboard of my computer was a reminder of the things I have done that have caused the Holy Spirit to grieve over me. The things I have done—and done deliberately—have broken His heart. Oh, that my heart would be broken, that my tears would fall, that my spirit would be more

in tune with His Spirit, that I might feel the same sorrow and grief over my own sin that He feels! Oh, that we all might receive a fresh understanding of how our sins—even the “little” sins that we don’t think too much of—have broken His heart! It grieves Him to see the believer’s spiritual progress interrupted by sin. It grieves Him to know that our relationship with our Heavenly Father has been broken or marred. The work of the Holy Spirit shifts from glorifying Christ in our lives and changing us into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18), to the work of leading us to repentance and confession of sin.

Look at the very first word in verse 30. It may vary depending on the translation you happen to be using, but in the original text, the first word in this sentence is the word translated “and.” This is a connective word, and it ties together the thought in verse 29 with that in verse 30. “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths...and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*” That is certainly the basic context here, but it is also true that verse 30 could look forward to verse 31. “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, etc.*” But are these the only ways we might grieve the Holy Spirit?

To help us to understand this expression "grieving the Spirit of God" please turn with me to Mark 3:1-5—“*Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed [**grieved**] at their stubborn [**hardness**] hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.*”

The King James Version translates verse five, “*And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart....,*” This 'grieved' in Mark 3 is very closely related to the word “grieved” in Ephesians 4:30. And what was it that grieved Jesus? “*The hardness of their hearts.*” It shows us how the Holy Spirit is grieved if our hearts are hardened toward the things of the Spirit of God, we do not have compassion, we do not care for each other, or we live as though Christ is not Lord of our lives at all!

Do not miss that idea that Jesus was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. I repeat: do not miss this! Go back to Ephesians 4, this time to verse 18. Do you remember this? In talking about the people whose lives are separated from God, Paul said, “*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the **hardening of their hearts.***” This is so important! The word that Paul used in Ephesians 4 to describe the hardening of hearts is the same word which Mark used to describe what broke Jesus’ heart in Mark 3! Remember that it’s the word *porosis* that today is used in medical terms, and it describes a callus which forms along a bone fracture. It’s harder than the bone itself. So

we have come full circle haven't we? Paul told us in verse 18 that we must no longer live like that—and one of the things that must go is hardening of our hearts. When our hearts are hard and rigid, then the heart of the Holy Spirit is broken over our calloused attitude toward one another and toward spiritual things.

There is a heavy emphasis on the Spirit of God in Ephesians, mentioning Him again and again. If you read this letter carefully it will be obvious as to why that is so. God wants us to know that apart from Him we cannot be saved, and that whatever good there is in us has its origin in the Holy Spirit. He gives us life and He sustains that life. Everything we have comes from Him, and everything we know comes from Him. We cannot know anything about God Himself without the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In fact, Ephesians 4:30 tells us that the Holy Spirit is our seal for the day of redemption. So, since the Holy Spirit is the Author of anything which is good in us, then it follows that anything we might do or say which would pollute our souls or harm the body of Christ—any unresolved anger, wrong thinking, vengeful thought or action, refusal to see to the needs of others, or filthy thought or speech, is “grieving” the Holy Spirit.

We grieve the Holy Spirit when we doubt Him and fail to trust Him and believe His promises. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we refuse to surrender ourselves completely to Him. The Holy Spirit of God is grieved whenever we refuse to listen to Him and obey His voice, or when we refuse to deeply repent of our sin and submit to His leadership and influence. One preacher (Spurgeon) pointed out “If we neglect prayer, if our closet door is cob-webbed, if we forget to read the Scriptures, if the leaves of our Bible are almost stuck together by neglect, if we never seek to do any good in the world, if we live merely for ourselves and not to Christ, then the Holy Spirit will be grieved.”

You see, *all sin* is grievous to him. He is not called the *Holy* Spirit for nothing, so anything in our lives which could be classified as *unholy* causes a conflict with His presence in us. And it causes anguish in Him. This should be our primary motivation for keeping our lives pure. Do you remember as a child, being tempted to do something your mom or dad had told you not to do? You started to do it, and then stopped, not necessarily because the deed was bad on its own, but because you knew your mom or dad would be hurt by it if you did. “We should be warned by remembering that our sin hurts God;—did it not kill Christ?”

And we are told that our sin grieves the Holy Spirit because God wants us to know how deeply sin affects Him, and how deeply it affects us. We need to reach the point once again where we feel God's sorrow over our sin.

Robert Boyd Munger once wrote a little book called *My Heart Christ's Home*. He compared the entrance of Christ into his life to an actual visit by Christ to his physical house. It begins this way:

One evening I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. What an entrance He made! It was not a spectacular, emotional thing, but very real. Something happened at the very center of my life. He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire on the hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness, and He filled the emptiness with His own loving, wonderful fellowship. I have never regretted opening the door to Christ and I never will.

In the joy of this new relationship I said to Jesus Christ, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be Yours. I want to have You settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to You. Let me show You around."

He showed Jesus the study, the dining room, and the living room. They went to the workroom and the rec room. But they had not been everywhere in that house, which represented Munger's heart. Then we come to a portion of the house where Christ had not been invited in. We pick up with Munger's words:

### **The Hall Closet**

One day I found Him waiting for me at the door. An arresting look was in His eye. As I entered, He said to me, "There is a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet." As soon as He said this, I knew what He was talking about. There was a small closet up there on the hall landing, just a few feet square. In that closet, behind lock and key, I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anyone to know about. Certainly, I did not want Christ to see them. I knew they were dead and rotting things left over from my old life. I wanted them so for myself that I was afraid to admit they were there.

Reluctantly, I went up with Him, and as we mounted the stairs the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed to the door. I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the living room, the workroom, the rec room, and now He was asking me about a little two-by-four closet. I said to myself, "This is too much! I am not going to give Him the key."

"Well," He said, reading my thoughts, "if you think I'm going to stay up here on the second floor with this smell, you are mistaken. I will go out on the porch."

Then I saw Him start down the stairs. When one comes to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense Him withdrawing His fellowship. I had to give in.

"I'll give you the key," I said sadly, "but You will have to open the closet and clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it."

"Just give me the key," He said. "Authorize me to take care of that closet and I will."

With trembling fingers I passed the key to Him. He took it, walked over to the door, opened it, entered, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting in there, and threw it away. Then He cleaned the closet and painted it. It was done in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!

What about you? As you look at your relationship with God, are you grieving the Holy Spirit today? Is there something in the hall closet of your life that is rotting away and putrefying, something which needs to be confessed and repented of and cleansed? Has your heart grown hard and calloused to the Spirit's calling and claims on your life? Is it time to repent of the hardness of heart that not only allows you to sin, but also to sin without even feeling any grief over it?

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