

**COMMANDS OF THE SPIRIT:
(2) DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Ephesians 4:30

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June 7, 2009

PROLOGUE

Maltbie D. Babcock penned this piece of inspirational verse on the Holy Spirit entitled, “No Distant Lord.”

No distant Lord have I,
Loving afar to be.
Made flesh for me He cannot rest
Until He rests in me....

Ascended now to God
My witness there to be,
His witness here am I because
His Spirit dwells in me.

SCRIPTURE

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. {31} Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, {32} and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:30-32 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday (May 31) was Pentecost. Christians associate Pentecost with the Holy Spirit — God’s personal, gracious, and enabling presence at work in the lives of his people. In keeping with the season of Pentecost we are looking at the four commands related to the believer’s relationship to the Holy Spirit found in the New Testament: WALK BY THE SPIRIT, DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, and DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT.

Today we shall look at the second command: DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1. REVEALS THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Grieve is a love word. Only persons can grieve, objects cannot. This command, therefore, reveals the personality of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an it or an abstract force like gravity. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Spirit acts with intelligence, will, individuality and intentionality. The force of gravity can not intend to do anything. Only personal beings can

have intentions.

The Bible uses personal pronouns to refer to the Holy Spirit. Jesus, speaking of the Spirit, said:

“Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7).

We sometimes refer to impersonal objects with personal pronouns such as ships, cars or even the church. But we do so as poetic expressions. When the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit using personal pronouns, the expressions are not poetic.

The Holy Spirit performs personal tasks. He teaches (John 14:26), leads (Rom 8:14), comforts (John 14:16), intercedes (Rom 8:26), convicts (John 16:8), and gives commands (Acts 8:29).

We can have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. We baptize persons in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can pray to the Holy Spirit.

We can have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. I have concluded many worship services by quoting from the Apostle Paul:

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14 NIV).

We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person we may either please or offend, who can love and be loved, and with whom we can have personal fellowship.

2. IMPACTS HOW WE TREAT EACH OTHER

The command to not grieve the Holy Spirit has an impact on how we treat each other. Paul says we grieve the Holy Spirit when we treat people as objects of our bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, or malice (31). “Bitterness” is a translation of a term that means a resentful disposition that under no circumstances wants to be reconciled. “Wrath” refers to rage or hatred. “Anger” has to do with a general attitude of hostility.

Then there is “wrangling.” The term “wrangling” as a vice would surprise people from the Western part of the United States since for them it means taking care of livestock. This reminds me of the story of the teenager from Boston visiting a ranch in Wyoming for the first time. One of the ranch kids asked him, “Do you know what wrangling is?” Not wanting to appear uncool he answered, “Of course I do! That’s when you can’t afford to

buy Levis.”¹

But an alternate meaning of wrangling is “clamoring” and is here used to translate a term that means to stir up trouble. “Slander” is speaking evil of others, especially when they are not in the room. “Malice” refers to ill will that has degenerated to the point of making plans to cause harm.

These six vices are sins of alienation. They push people away. They are quick to condemn and separate. They are opposed to the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, we please the Spirit when we are kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgiving of one another (32). The term for kindness in this passage is used elsewhere in the Bible for God’s kindness toward those who have no intention of reciprocating:

“For [God] is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked” (Lk 6:35).

In like manner, we are to show kindness to others even if they never show kindness to us. In his letter to the Romans, Paul sees kindness as an expression of God’s patience:

“Don't you know that the reason God is [kind] to you is because he wants you to turn to him?” (Rom 2:4 CEV).

To be tenderhearted is to be compassionate. The Greek word (*eusplangchnoi*) is unusual in that it was used by Hippocrates, “the Father of Medicine,” to describe a well-functioning intestinal tract. The ancient Greeks thought of the internal organs as the seat of our emotions. A caring person was regarded as having healthy bowels while a mean person was considered emotionally constipated.

The word for forgiveness (*charizomenoi*) is not Paul’s usual term on this subject. It literally means “acting in grace towards another.” God in Christ has acted in grace toward us. We are to act in grace towards others. This means we follow the example of our Lord Jesus (Lk 7: 33-35) in loving the person without necessarily loving everything the person does — a simple concept, but difficult and challenging to practice.

3. REMINDS US WHOSE WE ARE

The command to not grieve the Holy Spirit also reminds us of whose we are. We have been “marked with a seal for the day of redemption” (4:30). In ancient times a wax seal would have a unique mark stamped into it in order to identify the owner and destination of

¹*Wrangler* and *Levi’s* are brand names for blue jeans with *Levi’s* generally being more expensive.

whatever was inside the container that had been sealed. Earlier in his letter Paul has already made clear that the Holy Spirit himself is our seal. We belong to God and are destined for his future salvation.

Through the Holy Spirit we also learn we are the beloved children of God (5:1). You can only grieve someone who loves you and the Holy Spirit loves you very much. By seeking to please him, rather than hurt him, you are showing that you love him in return.

CONCLUSION

Years ago, Ann Landers printed the observations of a woman who regularly visited a care facility. It was described as a love story:

I see a man who, I understand, has spent the last eight years caring for his wife who has Alzheimer's. They have been married over 50 years. He...feeds her every bit of food she eats. He has bathed her and dressed her every day all these years... I cannot describe the tenderness and love that man shows for his wife. She is unable to recognize anyone, including him. .. I observed him when I parked my car beside his the other day. He sat in his old pickup for a few minutes, then he patted down what little hair he had, straightened the threadbare collar of his shirt and looked in the mirror for a final check before going to see his wife. It was as if he was courting her. They have been partners all these years and have seen each other under all kinds of circumstances, yet he carefully groomed himself before he called on his wife, who wouldn't even know him. This is an example of true love... (*The Prescott Courier*, March 10, 1991).

This is also analogous to the love the Spirit has for us. Day in and day out, the Holy Spirit seeks to pour his love into the hearts of those who have called upon Christ. You may not recognize his love, you may even cause him grief, but he will not go away. So why not receive his love and gratefully try to please him?