

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (30-6-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 4:30

Additional reading: Ephesians 4:30-5:14

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit

Introduction

These words form one of great verses which, in a nutshell, sum up the meaning and secret of the Christian life. The Christian life is not just a list of rules and regulations, but it is about belonging to a person, being sensitive to a person, responding to a person.

This test sorts people out very quickly. R.M.McCheyne said, “Unconverted man does not like to hear about the Holy Spirit. Unconverted ministers do not often like to preach about the Holy Spirit. Unconverted hearers do not often like to hear about Him.” To such, this test is very silly and foolish. But to the Christian this test arrests him and at once he realizes it is saying something very important. R.A.Torrey said, “This text ought to be deeply engraved on the Christian’s heart. It ought to ring in his ears day and night, in his personal, home, social, business and church life. It tells him how to succeed. It helps him to solve many perplexing problems and settle many questions in his mind.” [unclear where quotation ends].

Sadly the Holy Spirit is often a very neglected subject. Many Christians are Binitarians, rather than Trinitarians, failing to consider the work of the Holy Spirit, not seeing Him as the enabler of the whole Christian life. Then they wonder why they are in the situation where they are – sound, but sound asleep.

The Command – Do not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption

Turning to the Lord meant the Holy Spirit of God came to dwell in the believer. And among other things He is God’s seal – mark of ownership, and guarantee of security – till the second coming, when Christ comes again and we receive new bodies like His, and are forever with the Lord. He is not only *near* to the Christian, but He is *in* the Christian.

Must not grieve Him, not wound, not upset, not disappoint, not sadden. That tells us something very important about the Holy Spirit – He is a person, not an influence, not a thing. Impossible to grieve or upset a thing, only a person. Other verbs lead us in the same direction – He leads, speaks, guides, loves. He is a Divine Person, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is the source and enabling of the whole Christian life. He convicts of sin, He draws us to Christ, He gives new life, power, strength, He guides, gives assurance, teaches, helps us to pray, enables us to serve, creates the fellowship of the Church. And note this – if the Holy Spirit was a thing, we would be able to control it, but if the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person we dare not talk about controlling Him, He must control and do what He likes with us.

Therefore the Christian life is not just for keeping rules, but being related to a loving Divine Person. What does He want? What will please, or offend, or distress Him? It is about respecting and honouring Him. What place does the Holy Spirit have in the Christian life, in his thinking, in his experience, in his service, when he prays or reads the Bible? Would the Christian life be just the same if there were no Holy Spirit?

When we neglect or ignore this subject, there is no reality to our Christian experience, it seems so distant, we lack assurance, we go through the motions but have no vitality, keep up appearances, but have no depth. So full of ourselves, so confident in our own ability that we think we do not need Him or His ministry. We would rather put our confidence in other people, resolutions, past experiences, or our education, gifts, plans, wisdom, likes and dislikes.

In what ways do we grieve the Holy Spirit?

The Christian life is not a mechanical thing, but a sensitive relationship to a person. Not a legal relationship, but a relationship of love. Sin is not just doing wrong, but hurting a person. “Holy” is a clue to what grieving involves. The Holy Spirit is grieved by unholiness. In the context of this passage there have been various forms of unholiness already dealt with - untruthfulness, unrighteous anger, bad temper, stealing, corrupt communication from the mouth, using tongue for own ends. Still to come in the next chapter – bitterness, evil speaking, uncleanness, covetousness, foolish talk and coarse jesting. When these things are in our lives, and while we do not confess and forsake them, but cling onto and revel in them – that wounds, grieves, upsets, hurts the indwelling Holy Spirit who is with us wherever we are, whatever we say or do. We are never alone, He sees and hears all.

We also grieve Him when we ignore Him. Nothing more hurtful than being ignored or passed over as of no account. For the Holy Spirit, this is when He does not have the rightful place in the life, His will is never sought, His power is never used, when we do not ask Him to fill us, to totally possess and make us holy, when He prompts us to pray and we say no, when He offers to teach us from God’s Word and we either keep it closed or read it in a perfunctory careless manner, when He urges us to speak or act, and we do not respond. Summed up by that word, “self”, being elevated above the Spirit. My will, my ability, my honour, my desires, my timing, my opinions, my rights, my reputation. When I forget that being a Christian means finishing with self because I am now under new management.

Finally, church fellowships as well as individuals can grieve the Holy Spirit. C.f. letters to the seven Churches in Revelations – leaving their first love, condoning wrong-doing, having the name without life, being lukewarm.

Results of grieving the Holy Spirit

He might bear with us for a while, but then His smile becomes a frown. He no longer manifests Himself to us or through us. Suspends operation. Does not utterly leave us, but ceases to manifest Himself. C.f. just like parents with children who think they know better – parents have to leave them to themselves to learn by their own mistakes till they do know better.

The Holy Spirit breaks, not the union, but the communion. We lose our comfort and joy in the Lord. The Bible no longer has much meaning. He has no power or authority over us. Prayer is a dull empty routine. We are no convincing witness to the world. Christian fellowship is no longer a joy but a duty which leaves us uncomfortable and embarrassed. Guidance is not known. No joy in seeing the Lord order our steps. No sense of love of God or joy in salvation. Then doubts come in. Assurance and certainty go. We become prey to one temptation after another. If we are involved in Christian service, we may continue to go through the motions, to say all the right and orthodox things, but there is no conviction or joy in service. We do not feel like we belong to the Lord. We do not lose our salvation, but lose the joy of it.

We are simply abandoned, and left to ourselves we often feel wretched, ashamed, miserable and helpless. If we are truly saved, we are not totally abandoned or eternally lost, because a seal is a seal. No one can break that seal of God's ownership. We do not drift in and out of salvation. But the person in this condition dare not presume or trade on this, content to go on in this wretched spiritual state and not concerned to do anything about it. Need to ask if he may have been mistaken, was he in fact not saved, but purely a nominal Christian, is there evidence that he has been saved? Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

Answer to this spiritual plight

It is not true that growth in the Christian life comes automatically. The light is not automatically clearer, the things of God are not automatically more precious, and His guidance is not automatically more real. Various factors can affect when we are low spiritually – health, Satanic and evil pressures, physical situation. But there again it may be because we have grieved the Spirit. Need to ask, “Lord, is it I?”. Have we been left on our own to learn lessons and cry out in repentance for help, and ask Him to remove His chastisement.

Remember the fact of the Holy Spirit Himself, not just His power and gifts. Remember it is marvellous to be a Christian and have Spirit of God within us. Each day we need to remind ourselves who we are. Need to depend not on self in any shape or form. The more knowledgeable and experienced we are, the more that temptation increases. Totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to live our Christian life as it ought to be lived, and to serve God as He deserves to be served. If we are not consciously and deliberately relying on Him, we are automatically relying on self.

Seek God and spend time with Him and His Word daily. Ask Him to fill or take control daily. Walk in Him daily. Remind selves daily – We are His and therefore His Holy Spirit resides within. Our body is His temple. That should help to make the very thought of grieving Him unthinkable. He purposes to use us, our faculties, words, mind and will, so it is important that they are controlled by Him. Therefore we must yield self to Him daily.

Conclusion

If God is speaking – do not delay, or else the problem will grow and become more and more mountainous. Be honest with God. Make a clean breast of everything. Do

not be satisfied till the Holy Spirit comes and takes possession once again. Do not be content till your prayer is heard.

“O for a closer walk with God

*Return, O heavenly dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest.
I hate the sins which made thee mourn
And drove thee from my breast”*
William Cowper.