

# The Practice of Sensitivity to the Spirit

a sermon in the series  
The Apprentice: An Analysis of What it Means to be a Disciple

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Ephesians 4:30

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

**Discipleship = One who is surrendering his life to follow Jesus  
in order to be like Jesus.**

That's it. Therefore, there are certain characteristics in the life of Jesus we are to observe and emulate if we are to live like He lived. In this series on discipleship we are looking specifically at the life of Jesus and what it was about His life we are to imitate. We are looking at the spiritual disciplines. We first looked at the discipline of silence and solitude, last week the discipline of fasting, and today the discipline of being sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt this is a primary characteristic in the life of our Lord.

In every sense of the word, the community of faith, which is the church, is chiefly helping each one in that community learn how to live the life of Jesus. It is the task of this church to help each other live according to God's design. That design is Christ. If you say that you don't need the church because you know how you ought to live, well then, my knowledgeable friend, how's life working out for you? Are you really that much like Jesus?

God's act of conversion does not do all that is needed to equip you to live an overcoming victorious life like Jesus. It is the beginning of a new life, a wonderful life at that, but becoming a child of God is only preparatory to living a life as Jesus lived it. It certainly is necessary for that life, but only the first step. The life of Christ dwells within the believer and by that life he or she, you and I, should live. But it is not automatic. I fear so many of us, because of our deep-rooted faith in the sovereign grace of God, have made a major practical mistake in assuming it is automatic. It isn't.

After conversion, you have to enlist in the hard work of renewing how you think based upon learning to believe the truth of God. You have to identify all the lies that you believe and remove them from your paradigm and learn the truth about God and let that truth form a new paradigm, a new perspective about living. That's our job.

You will be hard pressed to find our topic today on any spiritual disciplines list. You probably won't. But this week it became real to me that it is no less a spiritual discipline. Sensitivity to the

Spirit of God is something you must practice over and over until it becomes a way of life—the life of Jesus in you and through you.

## I. Gospel Grace Changes the Sinner

Our text is a moral imperative (command) in the middle of a list of moral imperatives. This list of moral injunctions begins in verse 25. It begins with the conjunction *therefore* meaning that on the basis of whatever Paul said previously these moral imperatives are not only possible but necessary. What has he previously said? He said it is the power of God to transform our lives by the transforming power of grace.

### A. The Transformation of Grace.

In verses 17 through 19 he says, “You used to live like present Gentiles, now I’m telling you that you don’t have to live like that nor should you. You don’t live in the blindness and ignorance of your sins anymore. You’re not the same person anymore. Something has happened. You’ve been transformed.”

Friends, we are not the same anymore. A miracle has taken place in my life. I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me. That’s what Paul is saying. You are not to live the way of the Gentiles. Read these verses and get the context for these moral imperatives. I’m reading out of the Holman Christian Standard Bible because I believe it gets the tenses right when we’re talking about putting off the old man and putting on the new.

*“Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more. But that is not how you learned about the Messiah, <sup>21</sup> assuming you heard about Him and were taught by Him, because the truth is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You took off your former way of life, the old self (man) that is corrupted by deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> you are being renewed in the spirit of your minds; <sup>24</sup> you put on the new self (man), the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.” (Ephesians 4: 17-24 HCSB)*

Based upon this, Paul tells them to stop lying, stop stealing, stop allowing corrupt communication to come out of your mouth. Why? Because they aren’t the same persons anymore. This regenerating power of grace has transformed those who are in Christ into new creations, which means Christians can live the Christian life. It’s not impossible. In fact, you ought to find it normal. That’s what the Apostle is saying. This is normal Christian living. Jesus didn’t live like the Gentiles but was completely different. He was the altogether sinless, spotless Lamb of God, who was perfect in every way and gave Himself as a propitiation for our sins. The same is true for us, that is, if you’ve learned the truth of the Gospel. It’s a code. “The truth is in Jesus,” is always code for Paul to mean *the Gospel*.

If you believe the Gospel, something happened to you. More than just your mind changing—you've changed. The old man is crucified (Romans 6, Colossians 3), past tense, and you've become a new person. This new creation according to verse 24 is created in Christ's likeness. In other words, it's Jesus. You've been created after the image of Jesus, the last Adam. The old man, before you were saved, was created in the image of the first Adam and now you've been made after the likeness of the last Adam. We're a new race, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood. We've been remade after the image of Jesus, therefore you can be like Jesus if you have believed and been reborn. The putting off the old man and putting on the new happens at conversion.

The story is told of a young girl who accepted Christ as her Savior and applied for membership in a local church.

"Were you a sinner before you received the Lord Jesus into your life?" inquired an old deacon.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"Well, are you still a sinner?"

"To tell you the truth, I feel I'm a greater sinner than ever."

"Then what real change have you experienced?"

"I don't quite know how to explain it," she said, "except I used to be a sinner running AFTER sin, but now that I am saved I'm a sinner running FROM sin!"

That's a beautiful way to describe this work of God's transformation. She acknowledged that she knew she had remaining corruption, but now this new person recognized it all the more. The difference was that she was not in love with her sin any longer. She didn't run towards sin, she ran away from it. In the middle of this description of what has happened with this regenerating, transforming grace of God, Paul slips into the past tense and into the present tense. Make a note of this. Look at verse 23 again.

*"You are being renewed in the spirit of your minds."*

This is what you and I are to do. The transforming grace of God changes us and gives us the new birth, but now that I'm born again I need to be involved with God's activity in my life. I need to participate and cooperate with Him. The way I do this is by changing the way I think. My whole belief system needs to be exposed. Why do I believe what I believe? I should not be afraid to be challenged with everything I have held dear prior to my conversion. I need a new way of thinking because if I think according to the way I used to think I'll still have problems, but if I am to run fast from sin I am to think differently. That is the work a Christian is called to do. I say it's the same work of learning to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

To be renewed, not conformed to this world, and transformed by the renewing of your mind means it is strategic to the Christian life that you do the hard work of getting into the Scriptures and absorbing into your mind the truth of God and letting truth challenge your paradigms, your epistemology, your belief system. Challenge what you accept as truth and let everything be conformed to the truth that is in Christ. That's a process we're all in and will continue to be in until heaven.

The responsibility of renewing our minds is one of the greatest areas of ignorance in the church today. We have no clue how necessary it is, nor how to do it. Depending how well and often the saint is renewing the spirit of his or her mind will dictate how far and how fast from sin he or she is running. The fallacy today that is creating so much weakness in Christianity is the idea that there are some given to grow fast and be more mature than others. That is not so in the Scriptures. The reason some seems to grow faster and to a greater degree is because they are renewing their minds. They're doing the hard work. You will be able to progress in your faith to the degree that you're renewing your mind. Not just your knowledge. Knowledge is not the key. Believing what you know is.

You can know the Bible quite well and not have faith at all, much less progress in it. I was a preacher before I was saved. I had been trained in seminary before I was converted. However, that knowledge did not save me. Faith in the truth of God is the agency by which God did save me. Faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. The power is not just the truth but you believing the truth. The power comes in the grace God gives to believe. The grace is the power.

## **B. The Sanctifying Power of Transforming Grace.**

Now Paul moves into these moral imperatives to show that this transforming grace has sanctifying power after conversion.

*“Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, <sup>27</sup> nor give place to the devil. <sup>28</sup> Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. <sup>29</sup> Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. <sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:25-32)*

Right in the middle of these moral imperatives that you I are to do—God will not do them for you—Paul sticks our text, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” What does this mean? Is it just another thing on the list of many things we're supposed to not do? It's more than that. It's obvious any of these things will grieve the Holy Spirit. In other words, what he's trying to say here is how you are to walk before the Lord—you walk holy, as He is holy.

That's the introduction to this message and it's necessary to understand the text.

## II. The Nature of the Holy Spirit

Since we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit, I need to know something about Him. Who is He? All I need to know about Him in order to keep this injunction is found in this one verse.

*"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."  
(Ephesians 4:30)*

### A. He is a Person.

Only a person can be grieved. Only a personality has the emotion of sorrow and pain, regret and grief. A person, which is a human being, an angelic creature, or God, can experience grief, therefore the Holy Spirit must be a person. We know this to be true, do we not? He's the third person of the triune God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, each equal to the others. He is the full substance of God. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be just like Him, another *parakletos*, another comforter. He ascribes to Him all the attributes of personhood. The Holy Spirit is a person.

### B. He is a Person Who Loves.

The word *grieved* speaks of relationship—a relationship of love. It's true, a complete stranger can grieve you, but not to the degree a person whom you love can. In fact, the closer the relationship, the greater possibility for grief. I don't need to press this point any further. Those that are closest to you can wound you deeper than anyone else can. This means the Holy Spirit is a person of love, one who loves us more than we can ever define or imagine and because of His love relationship with us He is easily grieved.

### C. He is Easily Grieved.

The Holy Spirit is often symbolized by a dove, which is a gentle creature. Jesus said, "be... harmless as a dove." A dove is a gentle creature, one easily disturbed. A creature of peace. In fact, the universal sign of peace is a dove with an olive branch in his mouth. This tells us that the Holy Spirit is easily and quickly grieved. Why is that? Because He is holy.

### D. He is Holy.

Notice this. Paul uses the definite article and full title for the Spirit of God. He calls Him "the Holy Spirit." That's not unusual for us because we've come to know Him by that name, but often in Paul's writings he denotes the Holy Spirit by simply saying, "the Spirit of Christ," "the Spirit of Jesus," "the Spirit of God," but here he takes the time to put down the definite article and the word *holy* because he wants you to understand what it means to grieve the Holy Spirit. What

does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? It means anything that is not like Him grieves Him. Anything and everything unholy grieves the Spirit.

That's why He's easily grieved. It's not because He's temperamental and wears His feelings on His shirtsleeve, so to speak. He's easily grieved because He's the only perfect one around here. Everything around Him, including those within whom He dwells, is imperfect. So often His heart is broken, sorrowful, disturbed, grieved, because what I do is not in line with His holy character.

In this clause we see a lot about Him, do we not? He is person; a person who loves, and is easily grieved because He is holy while so much in us is not holy.

Anytime one of these moral injunctions is disobeyed, He is grieved. That's the first thing we need to see because that's the context. But it's not just violations of commandments or your actions that grieve Him. To think that way grieves Him all the more. It can be things you *don't* do. It can be nothing more than your thoughts, not just your actions or words, although they do grieve Him. How many times a day an unthoughtful word grieves the Holy Spirit. But He's grieved even by our thoughts. No wonder Paul says in Philippians to think upon everything that is good and virtuous, that's lovely and true, why? Because of the Holy Spirit in you. You grieve Him by what you think.

It's also what you don't think. I mean when you don't think about Him at all. That must wound Him. How many of our days are spent without acknowledging the Holy Spirit with us. How many hours and minutes of this present day have you gone without acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit? How long have you gone without acknowledging that He's with you? How long has it been since you've actively listened to Him or sought His counsel or looked for His direction? Not acknowledging Him grieves Him greatly.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Do you think there would be great grief in the home if the husband never acknowledged the presence of his wife? Do you think his wife would be broken? Would she experience sorrow and even mourning if her husband never acknowledged her presence but only on occasions like their anniversary or her birthday?

Do you only acknowledge Him when you come to church or hear the words *Holy Spirit*? Oh, how much of the absence of our acknowledging Him grieves Him deeply.

### **III. The Consequences of Grieving the Holy Spirit.**

We've all done it and it's probably our greatest sin. All of our sins grieve Him, but in all the times we don't acknowledge Him or seek His guidance, He is grieved as well. What are the consequences of this? Paul puts it in the terms of sealing.

#### **A. The Purposes of the Seal.**



**“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:30)**

Paul could just have easily said, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit” and gone on with his injunctions, but he doesn’t. He wants to associate grieving the Spirit of God with the sealing of the Spirit because in doing so he will explain what he means by grieving the Holy Spirit.

Paul is a masterful writer. Though he is a little difficult to follow at times, he is unlike any of the other writers in the Bible and will have multiple themes going on in his epistles at the same time. You’ve got to be able to connect the themes like a thread running through a tapestry. This sealing is a theme he has already acknowledged. Look back at Ephesians chapter one and you will find he has already used this language before.

*“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14)*

There it is. He has already introduced sealing terminology. So chapter four verse 30 ties back into chapter one verse 14. *You were sealed with the Holy Spirit.* What does that mean?

Whatever it means, we can safely say it happens after you receive Christ, after you’ve heard the Gospel and believed it. Therefore, it has to mean that God gives you the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the gift of the New Covenant. In the Old Testament you will read New Covenant language—the giving of the Spirit, “I’ll put a new Spirit within you...” “I’ll pour out My Spirit on all flesh...” The Holy Spirit was the essence of the promise of the New Covenant.

When you believe upon the Lord Jesus, you are given the person of God to dwell in you and be constantly with you, to always be there as your guide and director. Again, the word *parakletos* means comforter or helper; it means someone who is an advocate, who comes alongside to aid. Jesus said the Comforter would direct you into all truth, so you’re given the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. But why does Paul put that gift in the terminology of sealing? Because of what a seal was. It created the right imagery to describe the ministry and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

A seal was a device made out of metal or wood that had an engraving on it that was an important symbol. It might be the face of the person, it might be the family signet, it might be some words, but it somehow identified the person who owned it. When you would take that engraved seal and press it into molten wax it would of course leave the imprint on it, thus creating a seal.

In the day of Paul it meant several things.

## **I. Ownership**

In that day people would declare their possessions with their seal. By placing your seal on something you were telling everyone, “This belongs to me.”

## **2. Authenticity**

It authenticated something to be genuine. We still practice this today. Some documents need notary publics in order to be certified, which simply mean they need the signature and seal of a qualified person thereby authenticating it is a genuine document. The same was true then. The seal authenticates.

## **3. Completion of transaction**

It also distinguishes that a transaction is complete. At the completion of a transaction they would place a seal on it, showing it was finished. We still do that for mortgages or car loans. Once you pay it off they seal or stamp it to mark that the debt has been canceled, forgiven, paid in full, and that the transaction is now complete.

## **4. To put one's image upon something.**

The seals of the emperors of Rome were usually a profile of their face. So the ownership was often imprinted with the image of the emperor himself.

This is the exact work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is His activity. When you were saved, the Holy Spirit came and sealed you, identifying you as belonging to Jesus now. The gift of the Spirit is God's way of notifying not just you but everyone around you that you belong to Him. And not only do you belong to Him, but you're the genuine, authentic deal, one of His own children. The Spirit of God communicates to our soul that we know that we know we belong to Him. The seal shows us the transaction is finished, there has been a payment that satisfies divine and holy justice—Jesus suffered my wrath and sins and in exchange I was given His royal robes of righteousness and now I stand before the Father, pure, clean, and acceptable. The transaction is done. There is no more for me to do. It is finished.

That's what the sealing of the Spirit does and it's part of His activity in your life. His activity and ministry continues by His work to conform you to the very image of Jesus. The seal of Christ is on you now and He is conforming you to the point where you will look, act, and live like Him. That's the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

Paul uses this word *sealing* to show us the activity of the Spirit of God in your life. In Romans 8 the Apostle Paul shows us this activity in a very real way without symbolism.

*“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”*

*<sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” (Romans 8:14-16)*



The Spirit Himself bears witness that we are children. There it is—the sealing of the Spirit. How do you know you're a Christian? You're led by the Spirit. He directs you and you follow. These are the sons of God. The activity of the Spirit is to lead and guide you. Not only that, He gives you the sense of relationship with the Father. He's not just some angry God whose judgment you stand under; no, He's completely different; He's your Father. And now you sense within your soul that the Father is not angry anymore. His anger has been put away and you can come boldly to the throne of grace. That's the Holy Spirit in you. It's not just your theology working, it's the Spirit ushering you into the very presence of God. That's His ministry to you. Has he not said here that even the Spirit Himself bears witness with your spirit that you are the child of God? You can't explain it. Though your theology may be good and you might be able to explain it theologically, I'm not asking about your theology right now. I'm asking about your experience. Is there something within your soul that you cannot argue or explain, but all you can say is, like that girl who was saved, "I don't know how to explain it but I do know this—I know that I know?"

How do you know?

"I don't know! I just know. There's something within me that tells me this." It's not something it's Someone. It's the person and activity of the ministry of the Lord through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore when you and I grieve the Holy Spirit, it's somehow a violation of that seal.

## **B. The Violation of the Seal.**

*"And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed** for the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4:30)*

What does this mean? How do we violate the seal of the Spirit? How do we grieve Him and what are the consequences thereof?

Let me first tell you what it isn't. It cannot mean the loss of salvation because we are sealed until the day of redemption. In Ephesians 1:13-14 we learn it was the Holy Spirit who is the very guarantee of an inheritance we have already received. You are the purchased possession and God has given you the Holy Spirit in order to say that which He has begun He will finish. Paul wants you to understand the seal lasts beyond the day of your conversion to the day you stand fully redeemed. This is not talking about the day you were saved, that's not the redemption He has in mind. No, it's the inheritance yet to be received. It's the day you stand finally conformed to the image of God, perfected.

Even when Paul warns there is comfort for a believer. We may grieve the Spirit but the Spirit will not be permanently taken from us. It happened in the Old Testament when King Saul grieved God; the Lord took His Spirit away from him. Paul wants you to be sure and know this will not happen to the true believer of God. You are sealed unto the day of redemption. So what must it mean to grieve the Spirit?

To grieve the Holy Spirit is to bring about the decline of the activity and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life.

When you grieve Him He will argue His case with you to persuade you that you have sinned. We call that conviction. It works, depending on how sensitive you are to Him. Let us suppose you are not so sensitive because you've not developed sensitivity to the Spirit but have been like a lot of Baptists who say, "Well, once saved always saved, hallelujah," and in between conversion and heaven you're just waiting to die so you can get your inheritance. Maybe that's how you've been taught, but hear the word of the Lord today—that's not the Gospel Jesus died for! You grieve Him when you sin. There's more to this Christian life than just guilt removed and a home in heaven. God wants a relationship with you! He wants you to know Him and the joy that brings, and so He communicates. He talks. He interacts. He works. He's active. And depending on your sensitivity to Him you will either respond or you won't, you might not even know He's communicating. And if you don't yield or repent, as a result He's grieved a second time. When this happens there will be a decrease of the Holy Spirit's activity in your life.

### **C. The Decline of the Effects of the Seal.**

You will begin to sense something amiss and you won't know what it is. You will notice your heart is not as easily moved as it once was when you hear about the things of God. You'll discover the assurance you once had is weakened and now you question. "Am I or am I not a Christian?" Why? It's not your activity to assure you, it's the activity of the Holy Spirit and when His activity decreases the lack of assurance increases. There are many people today who are truly saved but have very little activity of God in their lives because their hearts have become dull. They're not sensitive to the Holy Spirit. They've lost His voice and forgotten what it sounds like, and His activity and ministry has decreased in their lives.

Let me make sure you understand what I'm saying. This is too important to glibly go over and assume you know what I'm talking about. The Holy Spirit will sometimes come to you and me and say, "Will you just come away with Me alone? I just want to talk with you for a little while." Which means it's a call to prayer. But maybe you say, as we heard earlier, "I can't right now, Lord, I'm too busy." Then you've just wounded the heart of God. That precious gentle dove has been foiled and His voice has been rebuffed and He is grieved. With that comes a lessening of His activity. You read your Bible and nothing happens. There's no sense of direction, no sense of the voice of God, no sense of the joy in God's glory. You begin to think, "Maybe that's what happens when you get mature in the Lord." Let me address that for a few moments.

I'm not talking about a spiritual maturity that doesn't experience God. There is no such thing. God does work differently, as I've taught you before, in new converts. They do have a new experience, their prayers are being answered, and things are extremely exciting, and God seems to be everywhere. But there will be a time when God will withdraw the sense of His presence for a season to grow them beyond emotions, but dear friend I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about you not acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit and not obeying Him. With that

comes the grief of the Holy Spirit and with that comes a decrease of His activity in your life. The effects of His works on your soul is lessened.

How many listening to me right now are in this very place? You've sinned against God and the joy of the Lord is not what it once was but you've not connected it with your sin because to you it was no big deal, it wasn't a major issue. Herein is our problem. We're not sensitive to the Holy Spirit and we do not judge holiness as He does. We redefine our sins and consider our ignorance of Him to be just that, ignorance. It's commonplace and no body needs to be held to any responsibility.

*If you don't know something how can you be responsible?*

You've been given the responsibility to know Him, to seek Him, and to know His ways through the Word of God. You cannot play the ignorance card here.

A lessening of the effects of the Spirit of God is what is happening in people's lives and churches are experiencing that corporately. No wonder there is no power of God manifested when they come together. Now wonder sinners can't come into their services and say, "Surely God is in the midst of these people." Why? Because His activity has been minimized because He has been grieved. So we go through our routine days thinking this is just the way it's going to be. This is the way Christianity is. "I'll go to church and I'll read my chapter a day, I'll pray my short prayers and I think that will be satisfactory to God," but the Bible says He's all the more grieved because you're treating it as if you can buy Him off.

Do you see the seriousness of this? Do you see why this command to not grieve the Holy Spirit had been given?

If you say that it's been a very long time since God has spoken to you, well then, take heed. You remember a time when the Word was alive and you knew God was teaching you and you experienced His direction. You knew His counsel and guidance, but it's been a great while. Well dear friend, you've grieved the Holy Spirit.

We're going to spend the last few minutes talking about how to develop sensitivity to Him.

## **IV. Developing Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit**

### **A. Renewing Your Mind.**

You've got to renew your mind. Verse 23 is so important to verse 30. There is a direct link here. In the renewing of your mind you learn more and more how He thinks. As you learn more and more how He thinks, you know more of what grieves Him and what doesn't. You learn His sensitivities and how holy He really is. You desire more and more of His activity by renewing your mind. You've got to believe the way He believes. You've got to get to know Him as a person and learn His ways. Moses prayed, "Show me Your glory that I may know Your ways."

## **B. Learning to Recognize His Grief.**

If grieving Him is the decline and decrease of His activities in your life then you need to learn when that happens so that it will not go too long.

The decrease of His activity in your life is the decrease of your ability to hear His voice. An illustration of this is King Saul. A moment ago, I mentioned Saul. It is one of the saddest stories of the Bible. He was a man who knew the movement and activity of God in His life, but he lost it all when he grieved the Spirit. Before Saul grieved God and His Spirit went out from him, he got all of his messages from God through the prophet Samuel. When God wanted to talk to Saul, He told Samuel and sent Samuel to Saul and Samuel would then relay the message. That's what prophets did. But when Saul grieved the Spirit of God for the last time that began to cease.

*“And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.” (1 Samuel 15:35)*

The word *regretted* can also be translated *grieved*. In fact, the NIV translates it *grieved*. As a result of this grief of God, we see in the next chapter that God took the Holy Spirit from Saul and gave David His Spirit. From that moment on, Saul could not receive God's message. At the end of his sad life, he consults with a witch in order to speak to Samuel. He pours out his complaint to Samuel, “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams” (1 Samuel 28:15).

The Holy Spirit will not be taken from the true believer. But some of the same effect that occurred in Saul will happen to the Christian, namely, the believer will not be able to detect God's message. The Bible will grow silent. Prayer will become hard. Fellowship with other saints will not communicate the joy of the Lord and the grace of God as it does with others who are walking in the Spirit. Have you not noticed that some can be so easily brought to joy or tears? They are so easily moved while your heart seems to be so hard. There is an answer and it's not temperament. No, temperament is not beyond the bounds of God's grace and Spirit. It's that you've grieved the Holy Spirit and God is not communicating Himself to you like He once did. The ability to hear the Spirit will diminish as soon as the Spirit is grieved.

Paul has made it clear, you are sealed until the day of redemption, but here is what will happen—and this will distinguish you from a nonbeliever—God will let you go. He will grow silent and you will not experience the activity of the Lord for a season. But there will come a time where the Spirit of the Lord will then take chastening to the next level. “For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6). The discipline of God will come to the child of God because He has made a covenant with you to conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. He will not come to you with gentle wooings: He will not come as a small still voice, but with pain and affliction and difficulty and hardship until you awake and arise out of your slumber and say, “God, I have grieved you! Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation! Let me once again walk as when Your voice was tender and sweet to my ears! Revive my heart that I may hear You again.”

How long has it been since you have heard from God? Be careful. Are you sure you are His? Without the Holy Spirit you can't be sure, can you? All you then have is human reasoning, *I prayed the prayer*, or *I was baptized*, or *I did this*, *I've heard this from God*, *I've seen miracles*. Friends, I could give you all those reasons before I was saved too. I've told some of those stories from before I was even converted. But they are not the grounds for your evidence of salvation. It's the Spirit Himself. It's only the Spirit of God that bears witness that you are a child of God. It is His Spirit to your spirit. Learn to recognize when you grieve Him. Learn to acknowledge the very moment the infraction occurs and then in humility and brokenness repent. Immediately you will know the forgiveness and cleansing of God. Don't delay with your repentance! Don't say, "Oh, I'll do that tonight," or "Maybe the next church service I'll do it." No! Now! You grieved Him now, deal with it now. The lack of your desire to deal with it only grieves Him the more. He takes it as you would take it—rejection.

Learn to recognize when His presence is with you. We're not talking about feelings. This transcends emotions. There is a knowing that I am in the presence of God and knowing that I abide in Him and He abides with me. There is a consciousness of that. I'm also conscious when that's not happening and I don't have the awareness of His presence. When that happens, I must deal with it then. That's what you must learn to do. How?

### **C. Learning to Acknowledge His Presence.**

When you know His presence, you will also know the first second that you don't have the consciousness of His presence. It is then you've grieved Him. Now you can deal with it quickly.

You have to acknowledge the truth and promise of His continual presence with us. This is not based on feelings or subjective emotions. He said, "I will be with you always. I will never leave you nor forsake you." I take that as truth. I believe that truth and as I believe that truth I'm conscious of Him. That's the only way I can explain this. There is a consciousness that comes when I say, "This is true regardless of what I feel," and there is a divine awareness, often not with feeling, sometimes with feeling. I've learned to live irrespective of my emotions. I have to believe the truth when there is no feelings and by believing the truth I begin to renew my mind.

Then I would say, you must learn how the Holy Spirit manifests Himself.

The desire to love the Lord and worship Him is the Holy Spirit's presence with you. Just saying, "Oh, I'm going to go spend some time before the Lord," may feel like it's your decision but that was the Holy Spirit's activity motivating and prompting that desire. There is nothing good in any of us. The Bible is very clear that "in my flesh nothing good dwells," therefore any good desires come from His goodness and grace. Do you have the desire to pray? Do you have the sense sometimes that the Lord is calling you apart but you say, "Lord, I already prayed this morning," then He responds, "I need to talk to you right now," and you say, "OK, Lord," and get alone with God?

That desire didn't come from you. That's Him. Learn to identify His presence in your life.

The desire to love the Lord, the desire to study the Bible, the desire to pray, all the holy desires and movements of the soul are from the Holy Spirit. Not your mind, not your flesh, but from Him, and He is constantly working in that. How many of you get up in the morning and you don't feel like coming to church? Did the Holy Spirit produce that feeling and emotion of not wanting to go to church? No, that came from you. The desire to want to be here is from Him. Those of you who got up and came to church simply because it's the thing to do, need to acknowledge that you've grieved the Holy Spirit. Somewhere in your past you have grieved Him and now all that is left is a dull, routine, and lifeless Christianity. Figure out where you grieved the Spirit, go back there, and seek His counsel and mercy. Learn to recognize His Spirit.

We must cultivate relationship with the Spirit. Talk to Him, go through your day and acknowledge Him. Ask Him what He thinks you ought to do instead of just making a decision, or doing like a lot of us do, get on the phone or text someone else saying, "Hey brother, what do you think I should do in this situation?" Ask the Spirit! He's the Counselor! He's the *Parakletos*. Ask Him! He might direct you to a brother or sister, He might direct you to the Word of God, or some other place for the answer, but acknowledge Him. Learn to cultivate relationship with the Spirit that is in you. The Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit.

One you have learned to acknowledge and recognize His presence, then like any movement or activity of God, when it stops or diminishes you must be aware of that, repent, and submit to the Spirit in you.

A missionary couple living outside of Jerusalem noticed one morning a dove lodging in the eaves of their new home. They believed the dove was a sign from the Lord showing the couple they were in His will, exactly where they needed to be.

One day the husband noticed a disturbing trend, that when someone slammed a door or if there was a lot of noise in the home, the dove would leave and not come back for a while. He concluded that they were on the verge of losing the dove's dwelling with them. So, he talked to his wife and explained that every time they raise their voices and speak loud, or slam a door, or make a lot of noise the dove seems disturbed and flies away.

His wife said she had noticed the same thing. Therefore, they agreed that either the dove would adjust his behavior to them, or if they really wanted the dove to stay with them, they would have to adjust their behavior to the dove.

If we desire the fellowship, communion, and power of the Holy Spirit, then we must adjust our behavior to the Dove of God, the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

One of the things you may not know about doves is that they are easily disturbed. They don't like noise as this illustration proves. Pigeons, on the other hand, while related to doves, can handle



noise. In fact, they will even light upon you once they get used to you. You see this all the time in large cities where people feed the pigeons. Some will have pigeons come and light upon them. But never a dove. Never. Because a dove is easily disturbed and flustered. The Dove of God dwells within our hearts and He is a holy person who is easily grieved. You and I need to develop the spiritual discipline of being sensitive to Him at all times to learn His ways and activity in our lives so when they diminish, and we no longer sense His activity, we will recognize, "I have grieved Him." Adjust your behavior to Him and His activity will return. Amen.