

The Biblical Doctrine of Sanctification

6. Grieving the Holy Spirit

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I. Ephesians 4.30 in the context of 4.1-5.2

II. What does it mean to grieve the Spirit?

A. Paradox

1. Examples

2. Cautions

B. Christology

C. Condescension

God as Creator teaches us that we are completely dependent on Him. It teaches that God is independent in an absolute sense: that He maintains His existence from eternity to eternity without any necessary relationship to anything outside of Himself. However, we must also note that being Creator involves dependence on the creation, a dependence that is not essential to who God is, that does not altar His independence, and that is not necessary but freely chosen.

This is a paradox. As such, it calls us to a deeply humble use of logic in subordination to Scripture in which we give conscious priority to faithful handling of Scripture above logical consistency.

1. Examples of God lowering Himself to operate within His creation

He creates by speaking, by uttering words. Being Creator already presents God to us with human qualities of speech and communication. Thus, in His free decision to become Creator, He decided to add properties to Himself (to His unchanging essential properties). By creating, He added those properties. They include the property of being bound by time (dependent on His creation). He created the fundamental temporal cycle of day and night and began operating within time, bound by the limits of each day. He thus was pleased to work out His plan of laying the very foundation of the world in a day by day pattern of six days followed by rest on the seventh day.

Many Christians reject the idea that the seven days of creation are “regular” days given the fact for example that *solar days* cannot exist before there is a solar system, which comes into being on the fourth day. Per this discussion, one way to view this rejection is to see it as a misunderstanding of God’s free decision to create and by creating take on (add to His essential properties) contingent human properties such as the property of being bound by time. Thus, He has to wait until the evening of one day passes into morning of the next before He can continue His creative work; of course, so engaging with the creation accords with, and serves, His plan.

Furthermore, God has the emotion of feeling delight in what He creates each day within time, saying, “It is good.” He gives the 6-1 pattern for man to follow by *His own real example*. He worked then stopped working. Among the things that we learn from the 6-1 pattern is that it is a pattern for all of creation history. It is thus a pattern for man to emulate, but it also shows that God is pleased to work out His eternal plan in day by day process. He does things today and He has other things in mind that He will do tomorrow. Being in time and going through the process of today becoming tomorrow is something that He has chosen; it does not alter His essential deity and eternity. He is bound by time and depends on it as a quality He has added to Himself while ever remaining absolutely independent.

2. Lowing Himself to operate within His creation is condescension

WCF, 7.1: The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased

to express by way of covenant. The notion of distance is that of being or ontology; this is the distance between being Creator and being creature. Therefore, the only way for us to obey Him, relate to Him, receive His blessings, and know Him as the source of all these things is by His voluntary condescension (His free decision). He condescends to create and to redeem; He stoops down to relate to and operate within that which is lower than Himself.

How then does God express this voluntary condescension? He does so by way of covenant. All His dealings in the creation are covenantally qualified because they are rooted in the eternal covenant of the triune God. In the *pactum salutis*, by voluntary agreement apart from creation (not dependent on creation), the triune God planned creation and redemption. This grounds the monergism of redemption. The pact of salvation arose within God in His self-existence, independence, and freedom; salvation comes to us solely by His free and gracious covenant. This leads to the distinction between essential properties (who God is eternally and necessarily) and covenantal properties (those He has because of creation and redemption by condescension).

In Exodus 3.14, God identifies Himself as “I am,” the self-existing and independent one: “It is an ultimate fact about God that makes the human mind stagger and reel because we have no categories to describe or understand this element of the existence of God—that he simply is” (Oliphint 58). He also reveals Himself to be the God of “your fathers” (3.15). As God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He reveals Himself as a covenant making and keeping Lord.

D. Application

1. Consider the weeping, the grieving of Jesus over Jerusalem

Jesus is like the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, whose work in life included many tears and laments. He effectively and surely saves each person He sets out to save. At the same time, Scripture teaches, as in the laments of Jesus over Jerusalem (Lk 13.31-35; 19.41-44) that there is a deep desire in the heart of God to bring sinners under His protective care, and His desire abides as a polar opposite of their unwillingness to come under His care. His desire leads the Lord to plead with them, to invite them to the kingdom feast, and to urge them by warnings and promises to turn to Him in repentance. He urges them with great desire for their good even though they will not submit to His lovingkindness.

What do we learn about emotions in God from the emotional life of our Lord?

Scripture teaches both God’s desire and His decree (both His desire and His sovereignty). We learn unmistakably about His desire for the welfare of lost sinners no matter how adamant, foolish, and willful they may be. Granted, knowing His desire to save is not the same as knowing His decree to save. His decree has its roots in God’s independence and self-existence as the “I am” who thus says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” His desire is a covenant property. By stooping down to us, He took human properties of emotion to Himself and as God truly experiences them. Importantly, we need to have knowledge of both His decree and His desire. Knowledge of His decree to save is assuring and comforting. Thus, we rest in His strength and not at all in our own strength. *However, knowledge of His desire deepens our understanding of the Lord and His ways.* It makes us aware that God is not cold and unfeeling in dealing with His creation. Although our grasp of the emotional life of our Lord has many limitations, we learn that emotion exists in God in a way analogous to how it exists in Jesus as a true human being, as both the express image of God and the perfect man. The fact of emotion in God has to remind us of the important teaching that in the Christian life we may grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4.30). This should draw on our hearts and cause us *to be the most sensitive people on earth* in our walk with the Spirit and our life before men.

2. Consider the grieving of the Spirit in the Christian life