

# The Biblical Doctrine of Sanctification

## 6. Grieving the Holy Spirit

October 20, 2013

### 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

#### D. Application

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

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

We must try to do justice to the text when it commands that we not grieve the Holy Spirit by underscoring the fact that how we respond to the call to holiness in the context of Ephesians 4.1-5.2 (with 1 Thessalonians 5) truly affects Him. We can gather our thoughts in this direction by covering three things: what it means, how we do it, and how the command motivates.

#### a. What it means

Grief is a passion, which classically is something causally dependent on an external agent; it is how someone is affected internally; it is deeper than responses and reactions of outward act. Accordingly, it seems that the WCF says the opposite of Scripture in 2.1: **There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory.** However, Oliphint gives this explanation: “when the Confession denotes God to be ‘without passions,’ what it is saying is that, however and whatever God ‘feels,’ he does so according to his own sovereign plan and not because he is dependent or because something independent of him causes him to *react* to something outside himself.” Thus, God is essentially impassible (as to His essence, He is without passions). The WCF speaks this way because it is concentrating on God’s being and perfection, as God eternally and immutably. At the same time, Oliphint reasons that because the “passion” of Christ is true “there must be some real and fundamental sense in which God can have or experience passions.” Then he quotes from Warfield on Philippians 2.5-8: “Now herein is a wonderful thing. Men tell us that God is, by very necessity of his nature, incapable of passion, incapable of being moved by inducement from without; that he dwells in holy calm and unchangeable blessedness, untouched by human sufferings or human sorrows for ever...[that is] haunting [neither true nor comforting]...Let us bless our God that it is not true. God can feel” (*With Us*, 87).

To grieve the Spirit therefore means to affect the Holy Spirit and to hurt His feelings, as properties He has taken to Himself to relate to us and communicate with us. He really and truly experiences grief by our conduct. Quenching is personal and smothers the Spirit’s desire for our good and His promotion of it (He is affected and what He does for us changes without altering the fulfillment of what He desires for us ultimately). Grieving is also personal in an even more direct way. It means to inflict pain, to bring sorrow, to offend, and to displease. Ephesians 4.30 is a negative command again like not quenching the Spirit. It is directly personal, referring to you in relationship to the Spirit Himself. Because of this personal aspect, this injunction is distinct

within the series. It relates to all the rest. It is a motivating duty in relationship to the other duties of the entire chapter.

We can fill out what grieving means by considering the opposite. If we do not grieve, then we please the Spirit. That brings Psalm 19.14 to mind. **Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.** “Acceptable” carries the idea of pleasure and could be translated, pleasing: let my words please you.

This is an amazing *fact* that God is pleased, and pleased with us.

How can something not present in God become present in Him? If God at one time does not accept us and at another time does so, has He changed? He is the eternal and unchanging God who is perfect in every way. In all His essential qualities that set Him apart as God, He is eternally unchanging. Thus, nothing can be added to His essence or subtracted from it.

Nonetheless, and here we are filled with wonder, with all His unchanging perfection, God can experience something new. He can experience being pleased and finding our conduct acceptable. So, we ask again, “Is this a change in God, how can it be anything else?” We have our answer in the true Psalmist, the true Israelite, the coming King that is foreshadowed in the experiences of King David. That is, from the person of Christ, we learn that God condescends to add human properties to His essential properties. He does this by addition without subtraction, without change in His deity. He does not undergo change when He adds the real experiences of human feelings to His unchanging essence.

Therefore, the most amazing thing occurs. You and I can bring pleasure to God, the Holy Spirit; we can please Him truly and find acceptance in His sight. We can bring Him pleasure instead of displeasure and grief. Trying to find words for this, we may say that we can give something to the Spirit, not something that He needs, not something that makes Him dependent on us in any ultimate sense, but we can please Him and not displease Him. We can be like sweet aroma that He smells with acceptance and enjoyment.

Hence, the prayer for growth in holiness from the inside out: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart bring pleasure instead of grief to the Holy Spirit and may my actions follow in kind by your grace through Jesus Christ my Lord, amen.”