

The Biblical Doctrine of Sanctification

6. Grieving the Holy Spirit

October 6, 2013

I. Ephesians 4.30 in the context of 4.1-5.2

II. What does it mean to grieve the Spirit?

A. Paradox (examples and cautions)

B. Christology

We ended last time by noting that along with the passages that affirm God's immutability, we have passages that, on the face of it, affirm that God repents and grieves. So, while we must strongly affirm that God is immutable, we must search for a better way to handle the relevant texts that present Him with changing emotions, better than simply saying they merely teach about change in us. This brings us to the preeminent paradox, which is the mystery of God manifest in the flesh.

We must not forget that this is a mystery as we seek "to be as biblically and theologically precise as we can be, just because in that precision the mystery and glory of God stand out in bold relief" (Oliphint, *God With Us*, 135). Oliphint's goal is to provide "a revelational grid [from Scripture] through which we can know and understand God" [in Scripture]. To do so, "We must take seriously the quintessential [classic, exemplary, definitive, best, ultimate] revelation of God in Christ, without which no one can know or understand God truly, and through which one can begin to see the depth and majesty of his relationship to creation" (134). Obviously, repenting, grieving & so forth are matters of relationship to creation.

1. The Westminster Standards

WSC 21: Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? A. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and [continues] to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.

WCF 8.2: The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

The language of the confessions and theology can be challenging, but difficulty is to be expected given the subject, the eternal Son of God who became man "in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever." It is therefore appropriate for disciples to do their best to understand the "quintessential revelation of God in Christ" (136) as the foundation for understanding God's relationship to us. These are not abstract questions of theology without practical import. Efforts to understand the incarnation of Christ have been driven by "the hope that the church would know and understand him better, and in knowing and understanding him better, be better able to serve and worship him-both in life and thought" (136). Christology leads to worship (Lk 10.22).

Let's test our thoughts on this unique subject by reference to some important distinctions.

a. The ontological and the historical.

Oliphint says, "Any biblical notion of the redemptive-historical must have as its foundation the affirmation of the ontological Son, that is, the Son of God as God and not, first of all, as Mediator" (137). For a test, consider the point that Vos makes in this connection: "The Messiahship is in Jesus' life the secondary thing, not merely in the order of being, but also in the order of importance...Messiahship will have to be classed with the things that are relative, not with the order of absolutes" (Vos, *Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 102). If we understand that ontological refers to "essential being" or "essential properties," then why does it make sense to

classify Christ's work as mediator as something relative and secondary (with no dishonor to Him)?

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b. The Creator and creature

The distinction between God and all that He has created is also important in this connection. This has been classically expressed by Van Til as the Creator-creature distinction and relationship. This is a good model with much to commend it. For example, it grounds true humility by expressing the independence of God from all else that depends fully on Him as the Creator. Thus, this helps us orient ourselves as creatures in full recognition of our utter dependence on God for all things. However, if we seek to express the fundamental difference between who God is in Himself and what everything else is in relationship to Him, then we need another model.

To move in the direction of another model, note that if we have two headings for a list, part A (who God is ontologically, *a se*, His aseity, what He is in Himself) and part B (what everything else is) then from the model of Creator-creature we get nothing on the list under part A! Why is that true? Why do you think Van Til would agree with Oliphint on this point that the Cc model provides nothing on the list under part A regarding God's essential properties?

c. Essential and contingent properties

Furthermore, reference to God as Creator has dropped off the graph altogether because that cannot be put under part B either (everything other than God). What does this fact suggest about the graph? For one, it suggests that it is inadequate. Here is why: being the Creator is a contingent property of God; contingent means that He did not have to create. Thus we have the distinction between God's essential properties and His contingent properties. Being Creator is like Jesus being mediator; neither are essential to who God is; neither had to be; both are because of God's free decision.

Therefore, Cc is a great model to depict the fact that God is independent of everything outside of Himself because it all depends on Him as Creator. Thus, even though being Creator points to God's independence (for all depends on Him), we also have to affirm that being Creator means that God chose to involve Himself with His creation. Therefore, *I say this guardedly and reverently with faith seeking understanding*, as Creator, God also took upon Himself the property of being dependent on His creation. This dependence in no way compromises His absolute independence; it is the result of His choice to add dependence and other human properties to Himself. We need to say much more but for now suffice it to say that in doing this God anticipated the incarnation and we can understand this dependence by analogy with the paradox of the incarnation. As the God-man is both independent of the creation and dependent on it as truly God and truly man, likewise, God as Creator is both truly independent of His creation (maintaining His existence from eternity to eternity without any necessary relationship to anything created), and He is truly dependent on it (by His free decision). For example (as we will develop later), when God is grieved regarding His creation, He reveals to us that His involvement with creation is such that He is affected by human actions and His response *depends* on His created image bearers.

Lesson: we must seek to do justice to passages that speak of God repenting and grieving at the same time that we give full weight to His immutability. Also, His essential deity must have priority as we seek understanding: "The hermeneutic [method of interpretation] applied to passages that speak of God's *dependence* must, therefore, be governed and controlled by his essential *independence*" (210). This is paradoxical and similar to the point that we must understand passages on the desire of God by passages on His decree while doing justice to both (or the humanity of Christ must be understood within His deity). The mistake of open theists is that they extrapolate from God's dependence to deny His independence: because He comes to know things about Abraham (Gen 22), they deny His omniscience and foreknowledge.