5-26-19

Ephesians 4:25-32 (3)

In this section of Paul’s letter beginning with verse 17, we have been told that because we are Christians, we should act like it. We, as followers of Christ are called to be holy. That is, we are set apart; we are different from the world. In these verses, Paul is touching on a few examples of behavior that ought to change. Some of these things were acceptable in the pagan world but they are contrary to what Jesus teaches us and expects of His followers. What Paul writes applies to us now. Before we came to Jesus for salvation, there were lots of things we deemed acceptable in our behavior that we can no longer indulge in.

Now, we must also be careful when we read things like this in the Bible. It is so easy for us to fall into the idea that if we don’t do these things, and if we do the right things, that we can somehow earn our way into heaven. This is in no wise the case. Our salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We can’t earn it. However, because of what Christ has done for us, it becomes our desire to be pleasing to Him. Additionally, when our actions are Christ-like, it is an evidence that we are truly saved and belong to Jesus.

In among these behaviors that we must change and what we must change them to, we come to verse 30. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” This almost seems to be tossed in there haphazardly. But this is really a foundational reason for following the commands of Jesus and we find this type of warning in other parts of the Bible.

There are several things to consider here, let’s start with the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force, He is not simply our conscience, He is not something that was created by God the Father. The Holy Spirit is a “He” and not an “it”. The Holy Spirit exists as God. We believe in one God, yet God exists in three distinct persons that we refer to as the Trinity. Our language and minds are incapable of describing God, so we do the best we can and take what the Bible tells us on faith. We call the Holy Spirit a person, not because He is like us, but because He has His own personality and part in our redemption.

The Holy Spirit loves us; just as God the Father and Jesus do. He desires for us to be saved by the work of Jesus and it is He who prepares our hearts, and also gives us the faith necessary, to accept Christ as Saviour. Once we are saved, He is the one who will guide us and make us more like Christ; in other words, sanctify us.

The Holy Spirit is eternal, He has always been and He will always be. He is active throughout the Bible. He is right there in Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the deep. Incidentally, in Genesis 1:1 we see God the Father who created the heavens and the earth, and in Genesis 1:3 we read “then God said”. God spoke, so it was God’s word; and we know that the word of God became flesh as Jesus Christ. So, there in the first three verses of Genesis, we are introduced to the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets, He empowered Jesus in His earthly ministry, He empowered the apostles and disciples in the spreading of the word, and He empowers us today. It is important to realize that the strength and power we have in the Gospel and faith is not our own doing, but comes from the Holy Spirit. We must consciously depend on Him.

This brings us to something else the Holy Spirit does that is very important for us and Paul wrote about it back in Ephesians 1:13. In Him (Jesus), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit of promise,who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

In Christ; in Jesus; we have talked about this before. It describes our relationship with Jesus; we don’t just simply know each other; we are bound to Him. Our existence is forever under the sphere of His influence. Just like a branch gets what it needs from the vine, we get all we need from Jesus. Now notice that once we are in Christ, we are sealed there; we are His forever. And we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This verse uses the word “with”, verse 4:30 says “by whom”. It is important to see that not only does the Holy Spirit seal us, it is with the Holy Spirit that we are sealed; the Holy Spirit is the seal. By this seal we are promised to be God’s forever.

When we understand this, we can see that the Holy Spirit is “stuck” with us once we become a Christian. If we truly accept Jesus as our Saviour, the Holy Spirit will not leave us. This is why it is so important that we do not grieve Him. Here again we see the personality of the Holy Spirit; He is able to be grieved; we, as Christians, are able to cause Him pain. As God, He loves us; as God, He hates sin; as God, He is entirely faithful and will not leave us or forsake us.

Now this does not mean that He won’t withdraw His help and power if we continue to act in sin. He will still be there as our seal and earnest, but we may be turned over to the power of satan to straighten us out. We see some of this foreshadowed in the Old Testament. In the book of 1 Samuel, we read of Saul becoming king of Israel and the Holy Spirit came upon him and guided him. But Saul was disobedient to the LORD’s commands multiple times, so, we read in 1 Samuel 16:14.

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.

Even though Saul confessed his sin, his heart remained proud and there was no repentance; therefore, the Holy Spirit was taken from him and he was turned over to satan. While we as Christians won’t lose the Holy Spirit, the threat of Him withholding His protection from satan is real. Contrast this with David’s sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. His heart did not remain proud and he humbled himself in repentance.

Psalm 51:11

Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

What we learn here is to examine ourselves often to see if there is any sinful way we have behaved; if we have grieved the Holy Spirit. When we find these sins, we must earnestly repent to restore our good relationship and fellowship with God. We must never reach the conclusion that because of our forgiveness in Christ, and because our salvation is by faith alone, we can do as we please and not worry about sin. The Bible is very clear that that is not the case and that a Christian is to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God.

When Paul tells us to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit, he proceeds to list some things to avoid and some things to do. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Notice that Paul doesn’t mention what we might call the “big” sins. He doesn’t mention murder or kidnapping or sexual immorality. Certainly, when he speaks of these “smaller” sins, these bigger sins are included. But I think his point is that we must pay attention to even the little things; they are important because they grieve the Holy Spirit too.

There is also another dimension; Paul has been speaking about the importance of unity in the church. All of the things listed in verse 31 will bring about discord; all the things listed in verse 32 will bring about harmony and unity. Back in verse 4:3 Paul tells us that we should be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” If we do not work toward unity in the church, we are actually working against the Holy Spirit.

To work against Him grieves Him; and that is enough for us to avoid working against Him. But also remember that there are consequences to working against the Spirit. If we work against the Holy Spirit, He will withdraw His power and guidance from this church. We must always be conscience of our need for Him, our dependence on Him, and so, take care to work with Him. This all applies individually and corporately as a church.

It does fall on each of us to consider these things. Is there someone we are angry with? We must forgive them. Is there someone we don’t like to the point that we wish them harm? We must seek forgiveness ourselves and put an end to those thoughts. It is imperative that we be kind to others, especially those of God’s people.

Paul admonishes us to “forgive each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you”. This recalls the parable that Jesus taught in Matthew 18. It is the parable of the servant who owed his master ten thousand talents and could not repay. His master had mercy on him and forgave the debt. Later, this same servant met another who owed him a much smaller amount but would not forgive him and had him thrown in prison. When the master found out, he not only had the servant thrown into prison, he was given over to the tortures.

Of course, God is the master, we are the servant. When we accept Christ, we are forgiven what we owe because there is no way for us to ever pay it back, we can never satisfy our debt to God. No human being will ever owe us a debt as big as the one we owe God, so there is no excuse for us to withhold forgiveness. We are to forgive. If we, as Christians, do not forgive, the Holy Spirit will not leave us, but He may withhold His protection and we will be fair game for satan; the torturer.

Back in verse 30, we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed for the day of redemption. We are safe in Jesus, sealed with the Holy Spirit Himself, and kept that way for the day of redemption. Jesus has paid our redemption price; He has purchased us out of slavery to sin with His blood. We still struggle with sin and we live in this world with all the horrible effects of sin. But there is a day coming when we will be redeemed completely. Our bodies will be made new, we will be freed from the effects and temptation of sin, we will live in a world that is rid of sin’s effect. That is the day of redemption; that is the day we are eagerly watching for; and the Holy Spirit is keeping us safely in the Father’s hand.

Consider the Holy Spirit; all that He does on your behalf. Remember that this is God. God is perfectly self-sufficient and content in and of Himself. He does not need us; He does not need any of His creation. But, for some reason, in His great wisdom, He chose to make us and give us life. And He chose to give us a way to have fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. And God the Holy Spirit has allowed Himself to be irrevocably attached to us until sin is abolished. Why would we ever want to grieve Him?

Prayer

Almighty God, how wonderous You are, that You would attach Yourself to us as You have. You have chosen to bestow Your great love upon us, Your creation, even in our sinful state of rebellion. While we were Your enemies, You made a way for us to come back to You, through Jesus Christ our Lord. You have sealed us with Your Holy Spirit and will remain faithful to us no matter what.

We consider ourselves and we consider You. There is no comparison. You are glorious God, incomparable in all things magnificent. We cannot even look upon You or we will perish. Yet, You have compassion on us, You lift us up, You make us so that we can be with You for all eternity.

Holy Spirit, we grieve You daily in our thoughts and words and actions. Help us, strengthen our spirits, guide our thoughts that we may not grieve You. Continue to sanctify us and keep us for that day of redemption. Thank You for Your faithfulness.

We lift these things up to You in Jesus’ name

Amen