

Grieving the Holy Spirit--No. 1

by Charles Finney

The Holy Spirit can be grieved by men through various means, including neglecting the truth, being levity, and engaging in vain conversation, which can hinder sanctification and thwart the desire to save.

Scripture: Psalm 51:11, Proverbs 4:23, Isaiah 63:10, Matthew 12:36-37, John 16:13, Romans 8:26-27, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, James 1:22

Topics: "Self-Examination", "Grieving the Holy Spirit"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of recognizing how our actions and attitudes can grieve the Holy Spirit, who is deeply affected by our moral choices. He outlines various ways in which we can cause this grief, including neglecting the truth, engaging in vain conversation, and harboring ill will or prejudice. Finney urges listeners to reflect on their personal conduct and the impact it has on their relationship with the Holy Spirit, stressing that every neglect of duty and selfish act can lead to spiritual consequences. The sermon serves as a call to self-examination and repentance, encouraging believers to align their lives with the truth and holiness that the Holy Spirit seeks to cultivate within them.

Transcript

Text. Eph. 4:30--"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

In this discussion, I shall pursue the following order.

I. SHOW THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN BE, AND OFTEN IS GRIEVED BY MEN.

II. HOW AND WHEN HE IS GRIEVED.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I. The Holy Spirit can be, and often is grieved.

1. The Bible, in this text and in various other texts, represents him as being grieved.

2. God is a moral being, and consequently he has the susceptibilities and feelings of a moral being, and must therefore be grieved with whatever is naturally grievous to a moral being.

3. His entire character is love or benevolence, and therefore he cannot but be grieved with whatever is wrong.

But as I have recently published a sermon on the emotions of God, showing that God necessarily exercises the feelings ascribed to him in the Bible, I need not enlarge upon the subject at this time.

II. How and when the Holy Spirit is grieved.

Before I enter upon this head of my discourse, I wish to make several remarks.

1. The great object of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible, is to sanctify the souls of men. Men are to be saved by "the sanctification of the Spirit through the belief of the truth."

2. He can sanctify men only with the truth. Sanctification is holiness. Holiness is voluntary obedience to God. Voluntary obedience certainly cannot be produced but by the influence of the truth. Hence Christ prays, "Sanctify them through thy truth." The Holy Spirit himself has no other means of sanctifying the soul but truth.

3. A moral agent can resist any and every truth. Moral agency implies power to resist any degree of motive that may be brought to bear upon the mind. Wherever force begins, moral agency ends. Were it possible for motive to force the mind the forced action would have no moral character any more than the operations of the physical universe. Action must be free to be moral action. Necessary action is therefore neither virtuous nor vicious. I repeat it then, that moral agency implies the power to resist any and every truth.* Whether any man ever did or ever will as a matter of fact, resist all truth, is entirely another question. But certain it is, that men are able to resist the utmost influence that the truth can exert upon them; and therefore have ability to defeat the wisest, most benevolent, and most powerful exertions which the Holy Spirit can make to effect their sanctification.

4. Every moral evil must be counteracted by truth, and can be counteracted in no other way.

5. Whatever, therefore, hinders the truth from producing its sanctifying effect, grieves the Holy Spirit just in proportion to his desire to have it produce that effect.

6. In preaching this sermon, and in all my sermons, I design to be personal in what I say, so far as this is consistent with addressing so many persons at once. I am not one of those who feel as if I should be convicted of wrong of course, if found to have adapted my discourse to the state of the audience before and around me. I never feel called upon to make an apology for being as personal as I can in "giving to each one a portion in due season." I wish, therefore, my hearers and my readers, to consider me as speaking to them individually. And as I cannot call you by name I beseech you by all that you hold dear, to pause at every step of this part of my discourse and solemnly ask yourselves, "Is it I?" Have I thus grieved the Holy Spirit?

With these remarks, I am prepared to notice some of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit is grieved.

1. By neglecting the truth. Men have the command of their attention and can take up any subject for contemplation they please. If they will not attend to truth they cannot be sanctified nor saved. Now how many of you are employing your thoughts about any thing and every thing else than that truth, which is infinitely important to you and wholly indispensable to your salvation? O, if your neglected Bible were allowed now to speak to you, what an overwhelming testimony would it bear! And when it shall rise up in the judgment against you, of what gross and ruinous neglect will it convict you! Me-thinks I can almost hear it crying out to you as you go about in the neglect of it--at one time wooing and beseeching you in the melting accents of eternal love to search it, to be instructed by it, and be saved--at another time it mutters,

as you pass through [the] room where it is, its curses against you for neglecting it, or perhaps it cries out to you from some corner of the house, in the language of warning, and expostulation; and yet you heed it not! Of what are you thinking? Would you not be grieved and afflicted, if you should write letters of great importance to some beloved friend of yours, and he should neglect to read and understand them? And do you think that the Holy Spirit has less susceptibility upon this subject than you have.

2. Levity of mind, and conduct, and conversation grieves the Holy Spirit. Levity of conduct would certainly be very unbecoming in the presence of an earthly judge or sovereign. And how much less tolerable is it in the presence of the infinitely holy God? Are you a trifler? And about what are you trifling--and in whose presence--and under what circumstances? Few things in the universe can appear more shocking to one who has any faith in God, than to see a human being whose eternal destiny hangs as upon a moment's point, filled with levity right under the searching gaze of his omniscient judge. Especially does this appear horrible and abominable when we consider the Holy Spirit as wooing, and beseeching, and following you towards the depths of hell, and pleading with constant and earnest importunity that you will turn and live! How can you--how dare you trifle? You would be shocked to see an individual, on trial for his life, trifle just as the judge was about to pronounce sentence upon him. But such conduct, and under such circumstances, would be decency and propriety, when compared with the unutterable abomination of trifling in the presence of the great Jehovah who stands, and commands, and exhorts, and urges, and threatens, and expostulates, and pleads, and, in every way, endeavors to get your solemn attention to the subject of your soul's salvation.

3. The reading of light and trifling publications grieves the Holy Spirit. Woman, Man, dare you spend an hour in defiling your mind with some vain novel or foolish story, when so much truth of infinite weight and importance urges your investigation and instant attention? Can Jesus Christ--can eternal life and death--can the glory of God and the salvation of the souls of men--can the commandments of God be solemnly weighed--can the blood, and groans, and mercy of Calvary be duly considered, when novels, and plays, and frivolous reading have gotten possession of your mind? O! you poor, wicked, helpless, loathsome, miserable sinner, what do you mean? No matter whether you are a professor of religion or not. You are a miserable sinner before God, and the law of your own conscience, if you spend your time in such reading. What is your name? Let me visit your chamber, your parlor, or wherever you keep your books. What is here? Byron, Scott and Shakespeare, and a host of triflers and blasphemers of God, and despisers of the Holy Ghost. Are these your companions--these the spirits with whom you commune--this the way in which you spend your time? And you a professor of religion? Do you not know that you are a great hypocrite to neglect your Bible and communion with the Holy Spirit, and give your mind up to communion with such earthly, sensual and devilish works as these?

But do you say I do not profess to be a christian? Then I reply, you are never likely to be a christian in such company. You might as well expect to be weaned from habits of intoxication by sitting in the bar-room with drunkards or while holding communion with a pipe of brandy, as to expect to become religious surrounded with such companions as these.

4. Vain conversation grieves the Holy Spirit. Christ says, "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." "And, for every idle word that men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the judgment." In the chapter of which the text is a part, the Apostle warns christians not to be guilty of "vain conversation and foolish jesting." Would you spend your time in vain and idle conversation, if you knew you had but one hour to live? And perhaps you have not. But suppose you have, are your circumstances those in which it becomes an immortal being to spend his time in vain

conversation? Do you not know that God is listening to every word you say? He is pouring the blaze of his eye through your inmost soul, as if he would speak out and rebuke you. Why are you not using your conversational powers in instructing those around you in the way of life? Perhaps those of your own house-hold, and your nearest friends need to be reprov'd and warn'd, exhorted and instructed in regard to their salvation. Professor of religion, how do you spend your time, when in the midst of your impenitent friends, and what is your conversation when in the midst of professing christians? I beg of you to answer to your own heart and to God. And if you doubt just how you appear to them, will you show them this sermon, and ask them to read this paragraph and then give their candid opinion of what you ought to think of yourself and of your conversation? Now if your conversation has hitherto been vain and trifling or useless, and in any way unbecoming in a christian, will you immediately repent and confess to those before whom you have laid a stumbling block--confess to the Holy Ghost whom you have grieved, and beseech him to forgive you, and return and take up his dwelling in your heart?

But perhaps you are not a professor of religion. Then I ask, Why are you not? And I add that you probably never will be, unless you make a false profession, if you are in the habit of indulging in vain conversation. Do you expect the Holy Spirit to strive with you, and wait upon you day after day, month after month, and year after year, while you keep up your incessant and senseless babble, regardless of his solemn presence, his awful holiness, and of his great and infinite love and desire to get your serious attention that he may save you?

5. Too much study, I mean too much mental application to those arts and sciences that have no direct reference to the sanctification of your souls, grieves the Holy Spirit. This is particularly a sin of students, into which they are sometimes betrayed by ambition, and into which, at other times, they are almost crowded by their teachers. Their whole mind is swallowed up from day to day in literary and scientific pursuits to the neglect of the solemn calls, and warnings, and strivings of the Holy Spirit. So did not James B. Taylor. With him it was the first and principal thing to obey the calls of the Holy Spirit. This was his determination, and a practical adherence to this rule was the secret of all his piety.

6. Neglect of study grieves the Holy Spirit. Where study is your employment, and you are negligent and attend to less than is consistent with all your other duties, you err quite as much as if you studied too much.

7. Too much business grieves the Holy Spirit. In my last lecture, I spoke of the necessity of diligence in business and the sin of idleness; and also of the danger of engaging in too much business. Suppose your father should visit you on some most important business, and that you should suffer yourself to be so much employed as to be unable to give him any part of your time. This certainly would be entirely inexcusable. But what is this when compared with the wickedness of being too busy to converse with God?

8. Not business enough grieves the Holy Spirit. Idleness is one of the greatest of sins, and wholly inconsistent, as I showed in my last, with either the spirit or duties of religion.

9. Intemperance of every kind grieves the Holy Spirit. In its largest sense, intemperance is any violation of the laws of life and health, in eating, and drinking, or dress, or exercise, in any thing and every thing that is injurious to the body. Every man is bound to understand, so far as he is able, the structure and laws of his whole being, body and mind, and to conform most rigidly and conscientiously to those laws upon which his health and highest usefulness depend. And yet how many of you are neglecting, and perhaps refusing to

give your attention to the examination of the structure and laws of your own being; and in the indulgence of your filthy lusts are injuring your health and beclouding and stupifying your minds, and are following in the footsteps of those "whose God is their belly, whose end is destruction, and who glory in" that which ought to be "their shame."

10. Self-justification grieves the Holy Spirit. Many persons seem to be as anxious to justify their conduct, as if they expected to be saved by their own works, and knew that to be found guilty in any thing were to insure their damnation. They are therefore continually resorting to apologies, and shifts, and self[-]justifying pleas, either in the way of entirely exculpating themselves from blame in any thing, or at least to bring their blame-worthiness into doubt; so as to be able to say, "if they have done wrong they are sorry." Now it should always be understood, that a spirit of self-justification is but adding insult to injury, first abusing God, and then justifying yourself in it. Such a course as this renders sanctification impossible. Why do you not, at once, break down, confess and forsake your sin? Why do you go about to fritter away your guilt? It is unspeakably great. No human language can sufficiently describe it. No one ever has or can accuse you of half as much as you are guilty of before God. Probably you never were accused of any form of sin, of which in heart and in the sight of God you are not fully guilty. But however this may be it is certain, and you ought deeply to consider it, that the thousandth part of your real guilt, as it appears in the sight of God has never been named nor told nor conceived of by mortal man. Your iniquities are infinite. They are broader than the earth, they are high as heaven, they are deep as hell, and black as the midnight of the second death. And why do you justify yourself, or spend your time or breath in making apologies for your sins?

11. Condemning others grieves the Holy Spirit. Perhaps some of you are judging and condemning those around you instead of judging and condemning yourselves. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

12. Speaking evil of your brethren or of any human being, or even of the Devil himself, grieves the Holy Spirit. By evil speaking I do not mean speaking the truth when manifestly called to speak it. But speaking falsehood is always evil speaking, or telling truth in regard to the faults of others, when uncalled for, is also evil speaking. God is love. He exercises infinite benevolence toward all his creatures whether holy or unholy. He is infinitely far from consenting to injustice in any case. And he is infinitely opposed to all injurious treatment of his friends or his foes. He would as fully resent, as sternly rebuke, and as promptly punish injustice done to the devil as to any soul on earth or in heaven. He will not, cannot, connive nor consent to any abusive treatment of the vilest sinners in the universe. You, therefore, as greatly grieve him, when you trifle with the name, the reputation, or the feelings of the wickedest sinner on earth or even the devil in hell, as if you were guilty of the same conduct toward any of his friends. He is infinitely unlike sinful man in this respect. Wicked men will connive at the abuse of their enemies, and even secretly acquiesce in it. But it is infinitely otherwise with God. There is a great and universal mistake upon this subject. There are few if any who do not consider it wicked to speak evil of a brother. But how many there are who throw up the rein when speaking of others than their brethren, and are guilty of absolute railing at and shocking abuse of the enemies of God; and perhaps also of the professed friends of God. Now let me ask, what are your habits in this respect? Woman, when you have company do you sit down and serve up

a dish of slander? Do you dissect and mangle the character of your neighbor? Man, are you a railer? Have you forgotten that God has said, "Speak evil of no man,"--"be no brawler, but be gentle showing all meekness unto all men"? Ah, but perhaps you are speaking of a political opponent, or of a competitor in business, or some opponent of religious views and practices. You think him very wicked--an enemy of God, of truth, and righteousness, and perhaps think yourself "doing God service" in giving him over to all the curses of reprobation. Now stop! O stop! Pause as upon the brink of eternity! What are you saying? Of whom are you speaking? Of a man "made in the image of God." Suppose he is as bad or even immeasurably worse than you think he is; can the Holy Spirit be otherwise than grieved to hear such language as this? Remember that there is a sense in which all mankind are the children of God. Suppose they do sin and rebel; will this afford an apology think you, in his view, for your abuse of them? I tell you nay. Infinitely far from it! And every time you do it, you grieve and provoke the Holy Spirit. And it is wonderful, that he does not turn away his face from you forever.

13. Evil thinking, as well as evil speaking, grieves the Holy Spirit. God looks at the heart. Your thoughts and the secret movements of your mind, lie open before him. And your words and actions are no otherwise pleasing or offensive in his sight, than as they are the expression of what passes within. You may, therefore, as effectually, and no doubt do more frequently grieve the Holy Spirit by your thoughts than by your words. All your silent and most secret musings, are distinctly observed, and marked, and pondered by the Holy Spirit. He weighs every thought of your heart in his balance. If you indulge evil, and unkind and unchristian thoughts of any being in the universe, he knows it and is as truly grieved and offended with them, although you may never have given utterance to them, as if they were penciled in sunbeams in every part of the universe. Are you in the habit of taking up a strict scrutiny and searching into the secret thoughts, and purposes, and workings of your mind? O how much you may have grieved the Holy Spirit without scarcely being aware of it. You can see, that if all the thoughts you have entertained, had been spoken out, both God and man might have been grieved and had a just cause of offense. Now remember that to God's ear these thoughts have been as audibly expressed as if spoken in thunder-tones. To God's eye they have been as open, and as black, and as grievous as if written in letters of darkness upon the very skies. Now do commune with your own heart, and be still, and take up the solemn question: what have I thought as well as what have I said?

14. A disposition to retaliate, grieves the Holy Spirit. This temper of mind is as far as possible from the temper of Christ, and is the direct opposite of a state of sanctification. The spirit of Christ would be, to forgive enemies, and those who have injured you, and to labor, and suffer great self-denial for their good. But the spirit of retaliation is earthly, sensual, devilish.

15. Prejudice grieves the Holy Spirit. There are few things more astonishing than that prejudice should be regarded and spoken of as it often is by professors of religion. Prejudice, as the term imports, is to prejudge a case, to make up your mind without hearing both sides of a question. Now, as shameful as the truth is, few things are more disgustingly common than prejudice among professors of religion. Making up their minds that this or that thing is right or wrong, and setting their faces, and using their influence accordingly, deaf and blind to every thing on the other side.

Scarcely any thing is more common than to find professors of religion of all denominations, on all the most solemn subjects in regard to men, and measures, and doctrines, in such a state of committal on one side or the other through prejudice as to render it useless to try to approach their mind and possess them of the real truth. And thus they go blindly and often madly forward in fighting against God, and the dearest interests of his kingdom. There is scarcely any thing I have witnessed since I became a professor of

religion, at which I have been more frequently shocked, and made to groan in my inmost soul than the exhibition of this wicked spirit.

And what is worse than all the rest, this spirit is spoken of by almost all as a calamity rather than a crime. The most unreasonable conduct and the most wicked and persecuting temper seems to be sufficiently excused by saying, "O the individual is under the influence of prejudice." And if peradventure a man gets his eyes open upon any question where he has been in the wrong, he speaks of his former vices and conduct as, in a great measure, excusable on the ground of his having been prejudiced.

The truth is that prejudice is one of the most detestable sins that disgraces the Church and grieves the Holy Spirit of God. And now are any of you under its influence? Of course you will say, no, for the very fact that you are implies that you are ignorant of it. But let me ask you, if you are sure that upon every subject, that at present agitates the Church and the world especially upon those great and leading topics upon which the nation and the world are so much divided: Abolition, Moral Reform, Temperance, Holiness, Revivals of Religion, Measures, Doctrines, &c.--are you sure that you have attended to both sides of the question before you judge?

Have you taken sufficient pains to inform yourself in regard to men and measures, and the actual or probable results, to have made up an enlightened and unbiassed judgment in the case? And if not, what do you mean? Why are your feelings enlisted on one side? Why do you use your influence in the manner you do? How do you know but a view of the whole subject would entirely change your views and practice, and cause you to go sorrowing down to your grave because you had been found to fight against God? O! how is the Holy Spirit grieved at the vast amount of prejudice which causes the jangling and misunderstanding and misrule of both the church and the world.

16. Pride grieves the Holy Spirit. Pride is undue self-esteem, and vanity is the exhibition of it. Nothing is more preposterous and marvelous than human pride; and very few things are at a greater remove from the spirit of Christ. It manifests itself in ten thousand ways; but wherever it exists, it is an effectual barrier against the exhibition or existence even of the spirit of Christ.

17. Ill will grieves the Holy Spirit. This is the direct opposite of benevolence or the spirit and temper required by both the law and the Gospel. Benevolence is good-willing. Malevolence is ill-willing. To will evil to any being under the sun is the opposite of all that is lovely. And how can it be otherwise, than that a God of infinite benevolence, should be grieved with the malevolence of any of his great family? How would a parent feel to see one of his children manifest ill will to others of his offspring? How this would enkindle his grief and indignation! And how must the infinite heart of God glow with grief and indignation when you are found with a spirit of retaliation or revenge rankling in your heart.

18. Every neglect of duty grieves the Holy Spirit. In reading President Edwards' account of his wife's experience, I was struck with a remark to this effect, that when she was in the highest exercise of grace, she was deeply impressed with the fact, that so much of religion consisted in the discharge of relative and social duties. Many people seem to overlook this part of religion and content themselves with what they call devotion to God. What they mean by devotion is praying, reading the Bible, attending on the exercises of the Sabbath, giving their money to benevolent objects, and such like things, while in their temper they exhibit any thing but the spirit of Christ. Now Christianity wherever it truly exists, will, from its very nature, develop itself to the view of men mainly in its influence in making them discharge all their social and relative duties; and if it be not apparent here it is certain that it does not really exist. There is such a vast

amount of negligence among professors of religion as to render it almost certain were there nothing else forbidding in their history that multitudes of them have no religion at all. Some neglect to pay their debts. Not long since I published a sermon on "being in debt," since which I have seen several efforts in some of the religious periodicals to put down or set aside the principles of that sermon, and to remove the pressure from the conscience of the Church and the world in regard to their negligence in this respect. Some have misconceived and of course misrepresented the doctrines of the sermon. Others, by criticisms upon the text, have endeavored to show that it was not a command to abstain from being in debt. It is not now the time or place to reply to those remarks. But I would here simply say that the doctrine of that sermon, that it is a sin to be in debt, is eternal and unalterable truth, whether that particular text prohibits it or not. To deny this is the same absurdity as to say that you may owe a man and be under no obligation to pay him, and the same contradiction as to say that you may neglect or refuse to discharge your obligation without sin. Now what is sin but the violation of an obligation, and what is an obligation but to owe a man? To what then do all such criticisms amount as these to which I have alluded? Do such editors and newspaper-writers expect to set aside the principles of eternal justice, and to persuade mankind that it is not sinful to be in debt or to suffer their obligations to go uncanceled by mere criticisms upon a text? The doctrine of that sermon is true, and self-evident truth, entirely irrespective of its being taught in that or any other text in the Bible. If there were no Bible, that is a truth which must stand forever, and to deny it is a palpable absurdity.

But again let me say that many neglect to do things when and as they ought to be done. Now it is certainly a part of religion to do everything incumbent upon us at the right time and in the right manner, and any and every negligence in this respect is sin. Have you an appointment to meet a neighbor at a particular hour for the transaction of business; be there at the moment, lest you hinder him and all others associated with you in the affair. Is there an appointment for a church or any other religious meeting, for worship or the transaction of business; be there at the moment, lest you interrupt or hinder the business or devotion of others. Have you engaged to do any thing for your neighbor or for any man or woman on earth, see that you do it just when and as it ought to be done. And in short, no man can keep a conscience void of offense--no man can fulfill the law of love--no man can abstain from grieving the Holy Spirit but by a most faithful and constant discharge of every duty to God or man.

19. Every form of selfishness grieves the Holy Spirit. I have often taught in my sermons that selfishness and sin are synonymous terms. By selfishness, I have often said that I do not mean the mere desire of your own happiness, for this is natural. It is self love, and not selfishness. But when even this desire becomes supreme, and leads you to sacrifice greater interests, for the sake of promoting your own, this is selfishness; and in whatsoever form it is cherished or exhibited, it is an utter abomination to God. How odious and detestable does selfishness appear to God, when he sees it exercised among his children in their intercourse with each other. If you are a parent, you know how you are grieved and offended, if you see one of your little ones bent upon gratifying himself at the expense of the good or happiness of the rest of your children. Now "if you being evil" are so stung and grieved with such a spirit as this, how much more shall your Heavenly Father be grieved at such an exhibition of selfishness among his children?

But there are so many ways in which the Holy Spirit may be grieved, that I must resume the subject, and also show the consequences of grieving the Holy Spirit in my next.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net