

John Wesley (extracting William Tilly; summarised by Michael Gray)

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

There can be no point of greater importance to him who knows that it is the Holy Spirit which leads us into all truth and into all holiness, than to consider with what temper of soul we are to entertain his divine presence. The title "holy," applied to the Spirit of God, does not only denote that he is holy in his own nature, but that he makes us so; that he is the great fountain of holiness to his church; the Spirit from whence flows all the grace and virtue, by which the stains of guilt are cleansed, and we are renewed in all holy dispositions, and again bear the image of our Creator.

In what sense may the Spirit of God be said to be grieved with the sins of men? There is not anything of what we properly call passion in God. By grief, therefore, we are to understand, a disposition in God's will, flowing at once from his boundless love to the persons of men, and his infinite abhorrence of their sins. And in this restrained sense it is here applied to the Spirit of God.

We are said to grieve the Holy Spirit by our sins, because of his immediate presence with us. They are more directly committed under his eye, and are, therefore, more highly offensive to him. He is pleased to look upon professing Christians as more peculiarly separated to his honour; therefore, every sin which we now commit, besides its own proper guilt, carries in it a fresh provocation.

We grieve the Holy Spirit by our sins, because they are so many contempts of the highest expression of his love, and disappoint him in his last remedy whereby he is pleased to endeavour our recovery. And thus every sin we now commit is done in despite of all his powerful assistances, in defiance of his reproofs, -- an ungrateful return for infinite lovingkindness! The Holy Spirit represents himself as one who would be glad to spare sinners if he could; and therefore we may be sure it is grievous to him that by their sins they will not suffer him.

But if arguments of this kind are not strong enough to keep us from grieving the Holy Spirit of God, let us consider, that, by this ungrateful conduct, we shall provoke him to withdraw from us. The truth of this, almost all who have ever tasted of the good gifts of the Holy Spirit must have experienced. It is to be hoped that we have had, some time or other, so lively a sense of his holy influence upon us, as that when we have been so unhappy as to offend him, we could easily perceive the darkness, distress, and despondency which more especially follow the commission of wilful and presumptuous sins. At those seasons the blessed Spirit concealed his presence from us, and we were justly left to a sense of our own wretchedness and misery, till we humbled ourselves before the Lord, and by deep repentance and active faith obtained mercy and peace.

I come now to consider by what kinds of sin the Holy Spirit is more especially grieved. The first is inconsiderateness and inadvertence to his holy motions within us. There is a particular frame and temper of soul, a sobriety of mind, without which the Spirit of God will not concur in the purifying of our hearts. Men are generally lost in the hurry of life, and seem to think that their new nature will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own as their bodies were conceived and have attained their full strength and stature; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions. Presumptuous sins are, indeed, in the highest manner offensive to the Holy Spirit of God. They must so grieve him as to make him wholly withdraw his gracious presence.

I come now to show the force of the Apostle's argument against grieving the Holy Spirit, - because we "are sealed to the day of redemption." We are sealed by our receiving his stamp upon our souls; being made the partakers of the divine nature, and "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." This likeness to God, this conformity of our will and affections to his will, is holiness; and to produce this in us, is the proper end and design of all the influences of the Holy Spirit. We are sealed as a sign of God's property in us, and as a mark that we belong to Christ. In whomsoever he finds this mark and character, when he shall come to judge the world, these will he take to himself. Now, if the Holy Spirit be the sign, the seal, and the security of our salvation, then, by grieving him by our sins, we break up this seal with our own hands and reverse our own title to eternal life. Besides this, the Holy Spirit within us is the security of our salvation. "The Spirit of God beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God" not only by way of confirmation of our title to happiness, but as a part of that reward at present, the fulness of which we expect hereafter.