

Cultivating a Relationship with the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 4:25-32

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

August 9, 2015

Audio: www.fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/296737-cultivating-a-relationship-with-the-holy-spirit

For years, scientists have been telling us of elements smaller than atoms. As one physicist explains, these elements are so small (called particles) that they are known only as they exist in relationships. Amazing...that the entire cosmos exists only in relationships. This led theologian Larry Rasmussen to say, "All created's are related's" [*Congregational Leadership In Anxious Times*, by Peter Steinke, p. 23].

Doesn't that apply to our spiritual lives as well? We only really exist in relationships. This morning's text is all about relationships--browse it with me. Burrowed down in the heart of this passage--almost to the end--is a small verse, v. 30. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Cultivating a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit is to cultivate a deeper relationship with each other. And to neglect our relationship with the Holy Spirit is to leave ourselves vulnerable and open to assault from anxiety, destructive relationships and spiritual chaos.

Now here is something fascinating. The Apostle Paul, writing in the first century, and yet his language is very up-to-date. He's talking in vv. 25-32 about an anxiety which permeates a community when relationships become unhealthy and destructive. It's a known physiological fact that when we humans sense danger, adrenaline surges through our bodies. We become obsessed with that danger. Writer Peter Steinke writes about excessive anxiety. It does the following: 1. Decreases our capacity to learn; 2. Replaces curiosity with demand for certainty; 3. Cements our position vs. another; 4. Simplifies thinking: either/or; yes/no; 5. Arouses sense of helplessness [Steinke, pp. 8-9]. Now review these items and think how the comforting, courage-instilling Holy Spirit could change this reality. Cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit helps us deal with anxiety in God's way, not ours.

Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. To grieve means to cause pain, wound, distress, sadness or sorrow, to wear out or oppress. It's the word used to describe Jesus as he wrestled with his choices in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37). Have you ever been a guest in a home but felt uncomfortable? All the words were right, but there was this awkwardness, an air of "you're not welcome here...really." A sense of unwelcome and resistance, despite all the right words. The Shepherd of Hermas (a second century Christian writing) declares that the Holy Spirit is sensitive to overcrowding. The Spirit can be crowded out by hateful attitudes and destructive relationships. Harming others is harming the Holy Spirit; harming the Holy Spirit is harming others.

Eugene Peterson has written: "The Holy Spirit is above all courteous. There is no room for coercion, no manipulation, no forcing. The Holy Spirit treats us with dignity, respects our

freedom. The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence, and what he empowers in us is...a life of resurrection" [*Practice Resurrection*, p. 202].

That's what Paul is saying. We're people of the resurrection. We are people of the Holy Spirit. We don't do unkind words (read v. 29, the verse just before the reference to the Holy Spirit). We're people of the resurrection and of the Holy Spirit. We don't do hateful speech, anonymous letters, divisive behavior. We're the people of Jesus! His Spirit guides and regulates. Remember our premise: Cultivating a relationship with God's Spirit also cultivates our human relationships; and neglecting our relationship with the Holy Spirit leaves us open to the power of anxiety, hatred and chaos.

Perhaps it would be good to review the three great stages of our salvation: **justification**, **sanctification** and **glorification**, and to note the role of the Holy Spirit in each. **Justification** is being set right with God, coming to Christ and receiving the gift of God's life. To receive Christ is to receive Christ's Spirit. **Sanctification** is the process, the journey of the believer's life. The ongoing cleansing, pruning, guiding work. It is the Spirit who comforts and guides, who gives us new want-to's and desires, helps us resist temptation, etc.

The third is **glorification**, v. 30. That seal is a ring or stamp that marks something as genuine. It is for the sake of security and preservation. Imagine this. God saves you. Then God's Spirit marks you and stamps you with a seal, for safe delivery into eternity. Note the language: "...seal for the day of redemption." This is our final delivery home (redemption, or release, emancipation, liberty). It was the word used for freed slaves. I read the powerful novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* this summer. Uncle Tom came so close to being set free, receiving his papers! Oh, how he longed for freedom, to be redeemed. Are you looking forward to that day when we will finally all be emancipated into the fullness of God?

Well, you'd better get to know the Holy Spirit, because this Spirit is the one who works in each phase of your salvation. Thanks be to God!