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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on  
Wednesday evening 4.7.51

Hymns: 310, 608, 30

Reading: Ephesians 4

Text Ephesians 4.30

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are  
sealed unto the day of redemption".

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How profoundly solemn and sacred are the things of God and the concerns of eternity. They surpass in their nature and importance and in their issues all material considerations. Material things may be of great importance, but it is very, very sacred and solemn to have to do with God and His things, and I have felt it so particularly today because, possibly of the painful poverty that I feel in my own soul and my inadequacy to speak before others and to say that which is right of God. How choice are the doctrines and how sacred the experience and how important the precepts, and when I read a chapter like this I meet with a number of inward reproofs and condemnations. Perhaps it is not so with you, who may be more spiritually minded, who live nearer the Lord, who enjoy more of the Gospel and are more graciously and deeply instructed; but there is no unneedful, unnecessary precept in the Scriptures.

It is to be noticed that the Apostle is writing here to a very gracious people, to a constituted church for whom he could pray with holy liberty and of whom he felt a joy concerning the divine reality of the Gospel in their souls. Perhaps I might say that they are the very people who will more tenderly, carefully and prayerfully regard the precepts of the Gospel, and being jealous for the honour and glory of God in the church and in their life and conduct, will continually pray to be built up in His truth and grace because they know more than anyone else does their dependence, their weakness, their poverty and their need. It is a great thing to be really brought down before God because if we are not our profession will be light, easy, vain, superficial. Unless we are really shown

and brought to feel the plague of our own heart and something of the holy character of God, our guilt, our ruin, and our desert, our profession will not carry the weight and sobriety that is desirable in those who profess the Gospel. This often condemns me. O the failings of which I am guilty in this! What a close line is drawn in the Scriptures in so many particulars with regard to the Lord's people, their life and walk and conversation and their conduct. Moreover, how they feel to need grace to handle matters wisely, perceiving that he that does handle matters wisely shall find good. O what a mercy to be truly humble before God and to have dealings with Him, because if we have a real religion we have that which is of God in us, which makes it a very solemn, consideration. The power of godliness in the soul is the power of the Gospel and the unctuous teaching of the Holy Spirit. O what a mercy to have saving dealings with God and grace to walk before Him, so far as we may be helped, in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless. Not that the merit of salvation rests here, but there is an effect of sanctifying grace and what the Gospel in us does. O may the Lord help us then by His grace to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. If we have been favoured to live, as I hope in some measure we do, in the spirit of this chapter, it would work a gracious humility in a right way; each would esteem others better than himself; it would tend to a gracious unity, for each would endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, not peace at any price, but in an affectionate faithfulness which can be exercised under the gracious teaching of the Holy Spirit.

I would like as I may be helped to apply myself to the word I have read. The Apostle exhorted these Ephesians not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God because the presence and unction of the Spirit of God in the public worship of God, in a believer, in a prayer meeting, in any assembly of people, professing people, is just that which makes the service unctuous, profitable, sacred. This is an atmosphere that can be breathed and felt by exercised

children of God, and when that is destroyed, when the Lord in solemn judgment removes that unctuous influence, it is one of the most solemn judgments that can befall a professing church. Churches can sink into a painful, low condition as was the church in Sardis of whom it is said, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God". Then again we have to see even in respect of Israel of old how that they grieved the Holy Spirit of God, as the Lord says in Isaiah 63 "They rebelled, and vexed His holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them". O I do not know what I should do if such a position materialised here, for when that choice influence, presence, unction and teaching is removed and a people are left to hardness and indifference, that is a very solemn judgment. By such solemn judgments the Lord dealt with His people because they provoked Him to wrath. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God". The Apostle writing to the Thessalonians also enjoins us "Quench not the Spirit". A child of God may do this; have you ever? O where is there one who could say they never had quenched the Spirit, that is grieved, wounded the Spirit of God? He is exceedingly sensitive, if that word can be rightly applied here,

"So gentle sometimes is the flame,  
That, if we take not heed,  
We may unkindly quench the same,  
We may, my friends, indeed."

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit". How often I try to pray that I may not grieve Him here in this pulpit by an unworthy, ungracious discharge of the sacred office of the ministry that is committed to my trust; for I perceive that, left to myself, how soon not only could this be but that it would be. How we need, all of us, the keeping grace of a covenant God and the Holy Spirit to preserve us and keep us tender in the fear of God that we grieve Him not. You can sometimes tell in your own spirit that you have grieved Him, you can feel it by the reproof that you get. I believe I have known this many

times and have had to mourn over it before the Lord. How soon we may fall and then we feel the reproof and we know that we have grieved Him. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit".

There are several particulars wherein the Spirit of God may be grieved and they are in this chapter, they are all here, we have not to go outside of the Scripture to ascertain how the Spirit of God may be grieved. For instance we may grieve Him by an unworthy walk and conduct in our lives. This matter of our walk takes first place here. It is worthy of notice how often the Apostle Paul uses that word "beseech"; it is like a fervent, affectionate entreaty to those whom he loved dearly in the Gospel, as though his bowels moved for them, being jealous of their honour. Frequently he uses the word "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Can you lie down every night and say as before the Lord, 'I have walked worthy today'? You may perhaps think you have and yet there can be an element of self-sufficiency and even pride of heart in it. But can you as before the Lord lay your head upon your pillow and say, 'Lord I am satisfied with the way I have lived and walked and engaged myself among my fellow men, or in my vocation, today'? Can you always say that? Can you often say that? It would be a wonderful thing if it were so. There are so many inward falls, are there not? But the Holy Spirit can be grieved by inward falls, by things never perceived by another, "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation". I trust as far as our outward conduct in life goes that we walk worthy so that there can be no occasion of reproach; but when you come to prayer, when you have a painful discovery of what is in your heart and of what may have gone on through the day what confession, if you are lively, what confession, what shame, what grief, may fill your heart! Perhaps all this does not apply to you as it does to me. "I beseech you that ye walk worthy" because this unworthy walk grieves the Holy Spirit of God.

Then again we may grieve the Spirit by fostering strife.

How timely is the exhortation of the Apostle in verse 3. He exhorts believers to endeavour, and there is something very particular about that word endeavour, as though he would say, it will not be easy for believers to live and walk in peace and unity together, because the enemy of their souls will ever be seeking to stir up strife and division, or to use some instrument to this end. Hence the word "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". O what an inestimable mercy it is when a church is favoured to walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. As to this, I feel thankful unto the Lord for it in my heart often. But still the injunction is not untimely, it is never untimely, unseasonable, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

Again, another way whereby the Holy Spirit may be grieved is by the ungracious use of our tongues. In this chapter the Apostle exhorts the believer to speak the truth in love and "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers". O how can we stand before the Lord in the light of this? Not that we may be guilty of speaking untruths, but is our conversation sanctified and profitable to the use of edifying one another in the love of the Gospel? I know that we should be faithful, and many have more grace in this particular than I have, but O how we may grieve the Holy Spirit by carelessness and lightness in our conversation. How guilty I often feel with regard to this. Here is the exhortation, and how often it may be some of you have felt inward reproofs even in these particular points.

Then again we may grieve the Spirit by indulging in angry passions; the Apostle says here, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath". How can there be a sinless anger? We read of God that He is angry and yet in Him it is a holy indignation, not that which often arises in us when we fall a prey to the passions of our own fallen, human nature. When the Apostle says, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath", he would exalt these Ephesians to a holy

indignation against evil and that which is wrong, a righteous indignation against sin. It was a point with these early believers to seek to reconcile matters before the sun went down, to restore peace, "Be ye angry and sin not" suggests a gracious control of the spirit even when there is some feeling of indignation against certain things. We may grieve the Holy Spirit in this particular may we not?

"Grieve not the holy Spirit of God". May we not grieve Him by neglect of the Scriptures? O how ready we often are to take up something else in place of them and how worldly-minded we can become. Not but that it may be quite relevant to take reasonable interest in things that take place in the land and in the earth, but is there not a propensity to neglect the Words of the Holy Ghost for other things of less importance? May we not grieve the Holy Spirit in this particular? May we not also grieve Him by a neglect of our privileges and of the means of grace that were secured to us at such great cost by the blood of the godly martyrs? "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption". The Apostle would use this argument to counteract the tendency that may be at times in believers, he would have them to realise that they are not their own but are bought with a price. When we can consider in a gracious way the tremendous cost of redemption and what is involved in effecting deliverance for the people of God from the wrath to come, of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus when upon earth, of the price He paid, the blood He shed to redeem His people, the weight of this upon the heart would, or should, according to this argument make us very careful of grieving the Holy Spirit, because we are a sealed people, "sealed unto the day of redemption".

This redemption may be considered in three particulars. It can be considered as the redemption effected by Christ in the death He died when He said, "It is finished" and bowed His head and gave up the ghost. It is true, that is not the day of redemption referred to here; yet it was the day of redemption when

the glorious Redeemer standing between an infinitely holy God and guilty man removed the awful curse, bore away the load of sin, bought His people with a price, the price His own heart's blood, and eventually redeemed them from all their bondage and captivity in which they were held under the law of God and the power of Satan. But the day of redemption referred to in the text may be two-fold; it may refer to the day when the redeemed soul leaves the body to be for ever with the Lord. That is a redemption as far as the soul is concerned, being delivered, redeemed, once and for all from all sin to enter into the enjoyment of that glorious liberty that pertains to the children of God. If we are the Lord's redeemed children, bought with His blood and justified with His righteousness, when we die that will be the day of redemption to us. But there is a day of redemption beyond that, the glorious resurrection morning when the body which is the purchased possession will rise again, when the dead in Christ shall rise first, and when the bodies of the saints shall rise to meet the Lord in the air, Then soul and body will be re-united, as we may understand it, though it is beyond understanding. The Apostle refers to this with regard to those who sleep in Jesus, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep". All shall be fitted, perfected to dwell for ever with the Lord. What a wonderful day that will be. It is a day awaiting every vessel of mercy. Now the Apostle says here "Ye are sealed unto the day of redemption". To seal here appears to be to make secure, to confirm, ratify, to make valid. Some of you know better than I do that legal documents in order to be valid in the court of law have to be sealed or stamped, otherwise they have no legal authority, they are not valid. Does not this apply even to the Lord's people? Every one of them was sealed, secured, bound up, enrolled in the covenant of grace before the world was. They were all sealed there, unto the day of redemption.

There is another sealing and that is the sealing of the blood

of the atonement. The blood of Christ is said to be the blood of the everlasting covenant, that is the blood whereby the covenant is ratified and all its blessings made sure to all the spiritual seed of Abraham. That was a wonderful sealing. Also there is the sealing of the Holy Ghost when He reveals Christ and bears His own blessed witness in your heart that you are a child of God. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His". They are all sealed, not one will be overlooked. No, He will never say there was one in Ebenezer Chapel, but I forgot all about him. No, to Him the weakest is dear as the strong. All are sealed unto the day of redemption.

I have felt it needful to bring before you this important word and do pray that we may by God's grace be preserved from grieving the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Amen.